

absolution.

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absolution.

by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

When Tommy dies, he expects to see Wilbur. Or Schlatt. Hell, even Mexican Dream. After all, that'd mean that there was at least an afterlife in the DreamSMP.

What he doesn't expect is to wake up to another world, one that his communicator tells him isn't exactly a server. He can't seem to find any other servers, this one doesn't have a whitelist, and... there's no admin. No Dream.

Instead, there are heroes. Heroes, villains, vigilantes, and civilians. There are powers called quirks, and they don't come from hybrid traits; they're natural. There's an entirely different society, one that doesn't have records of discs, mistakes, and the Blood God in its history for its base. There are schools that teach hero-wannabes who can soar to the top, and there are villains capable of flipping the world over its very roots.

There were no heroes in his past life. Tommy himself is far from one.

Yet maybe, in this life, he can at least try to be there for those who need it.

or; in which Tommy Innit "Theseus" Craft becomes a vigilante, a cafe barista, and then a somewhat-hero, wrecking BnHA canon in the process

or, a dsmp x bnha crossover because i'm in love with the idea

Notes

yoo!! first fic on here ahaha,, i'm only postin' 'cause my readers on wattpad encouraged me to

n e way!!! big big *big* note here: **in no way will there be romance in this fic.** not at all. none of it. maybe there'll be characters who act sexually n shit, such as midnight, and maybe some relationships are implied, but in the end, there's no actual intent behind it (at least, nothing w tommy in it). no. romance.

oh, and!!!! there's,,, a lot of triggerin' stuff in this fic, such as, but not limited to: **literal murder, canon-typical violence, panic attacks, detailed flashbacks, dissociation, and more canon-typical dsmp tws.** because i'm inexperienced in tagging these things and other triggers in the chapters, i'm leaving this here.

please, if you are not comfortable with any of those things, please leave.

as i am also an inexperienced writer, please be prepared for an incorrect representation of these triggers and trauma, ploholes, messy writing, oocness, etc. i'll also give sporadic updates ,,

most of the art here will be by me unless explicitly stated otherwise

with all of that bein' said, i hope you enjoy this fic!! :)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Inspired by [From a dirty crime boy to a hero](#) by [yeet3ms](#)

the end. (the beginning?)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

For what it's worth, Tommy never intended to lash out at Dream. Well, not *yet*, at least.

It's not entirely his fault! It's just. The cell—Pandora's Vault—was too quiet. Too stuffy, bland, hot, and so many other annoying fucking things. Obsidian blocks and their amethyst ravines aren't fun to count anymore when he keeps losing count at around five-hundred. The crackles and fizzles and popping of lava can only go on for so long before becoming irritating or just shitty white noise, and they only fill so much of the silence, too, this overwhelming, oppressive thing that Tommy had found to immediately hate. ~~(It reminds him of Dream and exile too much, the man in question only making his problem worse by fucking being here.)~~

To tackle all of that, Tommy tried to keep ranting about whatever he could, but he couldn't keep that up forever, even with the occasional comment from Dream. It was so bloody warm, too, being so close to the lava in a small space. Tommy... He doesn't care much about that anymore, though—so long as Dream was far away from him, Tommy would be fine.

He'd have to be. He can't show weakness now, not when Dream had manipulated him so easily back then.

Yet looking back on it, this silence was probably what started to bundle his emotions and stress into a bomb, what made him reckless and irrational. When Dream had started talking about a "revive book" and what it entailed, Tommy wanted to stop thinking about it, because *surely* Dream didn't have that much power, right? Despite Dream being an admin, despite Dream being an equal to Techno in power, he wasn't... Dream wasn't allowed to truly play as Prime, was he?

Tommy wanted to stop thinking about it. The silence didn't help.

And after what Tommy could only assume was a few days—or maybe weeks? Months? *Years*? Fuck, he didn't know and he never would—the nightmares came back. Of the final control room despite having forgiven Eret; of the festival and fireworks and Tubbo and Pogtopia, Techno and his Withers as he laughed and laughed, war and colors and smoke and ignited TNT, crimson leaking down his palms as he watched Phil *kill Wilbur who died with a smile and then exile and Ghostbur and how he grew attached to his own abuser and—*

Yeah.

Just... yeah.

~~(If Dream weren't there, always watching, waiting for *something* in the silence of the cell after Tommy couldn't talk anymore, then maybe Tommy wouldn't have been as fucking annoyed as he became.)~~

Either way, at least one of those problems had led Tommy to snapping. Really, both he and Dream should've expected it. Tommy's always been a "problem child" to everyone he's met besides Tubbo and his—family. Running off into danger when he was younger, constantly asking Techno to spar, causing the whole Disc War and most, if not all, of the other main incidents in the Dream SMP.

But Tommy knows that he really shouldn't have kept pushing Dream's buttons more and more until the man fell over the edge. He knows the consequences first-hand—the scars on his skin are enough to prove that.

Yet he did so anyway, because Tommy is bigger than that, bigger than Dream. ~~Because otherwise, Tommy might've started to fucking lose it.~~

"I'll get out eventually," Dream begins, his voice slightly hoarse and muffled as he chews on a potato. He and Tommy are talking, standing in the middle of the cell—well, it's more like Dream trying to rile Tommy up instead of the other way 'round. Though, as much as Tommy would like to stay away from Dream forever, he had to put up a brave front and talk *some day*. "Either you'll let me out or... people will be dead. And that's the thing because yeah, you put me in here because you want me to—"

Once again, more often than not, Tommy didn't think when he spoke. "I'm in—no, no, no, shut up. Shut *up*." He ran a hand through his blond hair, looking up at the glowstone placed in the top corner of the cell. "I know why I'm in here. This is... this isn't worse than exile." Tommy laughs dryly. He wonders if his teeth have become the same shade as the only light in their room, wonders if Dream's are blackened and rotten through. "This isn't worse than the exile, because the thing is. For the exile, I thought you had all the power—I thought you were fucking dangling me like a fucking puppet, man. And even though in here it's small, and I'm claustrophobic, and I hate this..."

He lowers his voice and dares to stare into Dream's cold emerald eyes. "Here's the thing, Dream. Here's the thing that I know: the revive book, Dream. It's not real, is it."

Dream opens his mouth to speak, but Tommy keeps pushing. "Because all you do, all you do that I—"

"Tommy—"

"*Shut the fuck up!* Look, what I remember from exile is that all you do is *lie* to me." At this point, Tommy can tell that Dream's enraged. He blocks a hit from the man, albeit slower and weaker than usual. Good thing is that Dream's hit was lagging behind, too, what once was an expertly placed punch now a little misguided and wobbly. "And then you unveil this big thing in the finale that all the fucking—"

Tommy takes a breath. "When we go down into your pit, here's what you tell me. You tell me that—" Raising a hand up, Tommy mimes a mouth, his voice rising. "'Oh! *Oh!* It was *me* who reorganized your beach party, it was *me* in the blue of the community house!' You are a clinical manipulator—a psychopath, if you will. So I know." That same hand moves to point towards Dream, the part of his face Tommy can see utterly blank. "This 'revive book' that you keep fucking going on about, this is your little *card* that Jschlatt gave you. Jschlatt was just a drunk fucking *madman*, alright? He wasn't just some guy that had access to this 'omnipotent revive book!' So fuck off, man. You're lying."

Dream speaks, irritation barely concealed: "You're—you're calling me a liar, when I'm not lying."

"You're lying! You're fucking—"

"Why else would I—"

"Why would Schlatt have a book about—he was banned for two weeks, why would that give him power to fucking—that *doesn't make any sense, man!*" Tommy pulls on his hair, a habit he picked up from Wilbur in Pogtopia. "You're just *lying*, aren't you? It doesn't make sense, that you'd have this revive book; like, it doesn't add up, alright? I don't—I genuinely think you're just lying again, and I'm not fucking falling for it this time, bitch."

Dream starts again, and Tommy resists the urge to roll his eyes. "Tommy, give me some time!" That shitty, pitiful man demands. "I'm *not* lying, you're being disrespectful and annoying, you're being a *little bitch*—" That's emphasized with a *CRACK!* as Dream grips a new potato like a weapon, grabs Tommy by the shoulder, pulls him close, brings that potato down, and *fuck*, okay, out of all of his mishaps and mistakes Tommy thinks this one's the worst—

"You talk to me—" Another strike—the world *blurs*, "—and you accuse me of things—" Another strike—the taste of iron fills Tommy's mouth, "—and you're calling me a *liar* and claiming *I'm* manipulative—" Okay, *okay*, Tommy needed to placate him, *now*.

"L-Look," Tommy says, holding his hands up in a surrender as he spits blood out to the side. "Stop fucking punching me—just, fucking hand me some potatoes, please." Anything to rid the taste of blood.

"No, I'm not gonna give you any potatoes." Dream denies petulantly because he's a bitch fucking *arsehole*, and he's moving forwards, looking Tommy dead in the eyes, emerald green to sapphire blue, and Tommy is the Biggest Man Ever, so no, of course he doesn't feel fucking *threatened*. "I'm not lying. Schlatt gave me a revive book. He gave me a revive book before he died. Because... he said—"

"Well revive him, then!" Tommy demands. "Revive him right now!"

"...That's not how it works, Tommy."

"Revive Schlatt, right now. Or are you lying like you say you aren't? If that shit's the truth, Schlatt will come back to life *right here*, and—"

"Tommy! *I'm not lying!* Why would I be lying about that?!" Oh this fucking wanker—

"You have every fucking reason to lie! You want to, to fucking—manipulate me, or some shit, to make me fucking—"

"Am I manipulating you if all I'm doing is speaking the truth?!"

Silence, filled only by their ragged breaths. If Sam had taken Dream's mask, then maybe Tommy would've had a better read on him.

~~(Maybe, he could've prevented what happened next.)~~

Dream leans back, suddenly, putting on a careless demeanor despite his tense shoulders. (First strike.) "What," he asks, "you think I'd want to save my own skin or something, to try and—"

"Exactly that!" Tommy snaps back, foot shifting forwards. "You're a *liar*. You're a liar through and through, and really, past that Netherite armor and skin, whenever I look at you, you know what I see? I see a sad little man who's insecure about the fact that this server has gotten so far ahead of him, and his only little glimpse of power in this world is gone."

Dream stays silent. (Second strike.)

"I see an insecure man," Tommy repeats, "a sad little man, alright. So fuck. Off."

"Tommy," Dream says, and *Prime*, Tommy wants him to fucking stop saying his name like that, like—like it's dipped in honey or some shit, trying to lure him into doing something. "Your life is literally in my hands. Does that piss you off; does that make you mad; does that make you so mad, that I—"

"My life's not in your hands, Dream. I know that you're not gonna do fucking shit to me, because the revive book is fucking fake!"

But no, this fucker, he keeps looking at Tommy right in the eyes in a tone that screams that he's smiling widely. "I might as well be a deity, Tommy! You can't kill me, and I can kill you!"

"You 'might as well be a'—do you not hear yourself?!" Tommy scowls. "Do you not *hear* yourself?! You're fucking up your own arse, you self-obsessed—"

No. No. For all intents and purposes, so far, this is the most civil they've been in this shitty fucking cell. The revive book may not be real, but Dream's threat of killing him definitely is. So Tommy takes a breath, fingers picking at a scab on his arm, his mind focusing on the pain. "Dream—"

Before Tommy can say anything, Dream leans in, the glint of his eyes visible through his mask a touch too insane. "What does that mean, Tommy?" He asks, ignoring anything Tommy said in the last ten minutes. "If you can't kill me, does that make me some kind of deity? Does that make—"

Tommy swallows his fear. "Shut the *fuck* up—*no*, Dream, that just makes me stronger than you." And then Dream bashes the bloodied, mushy potato in his hands into him again, and everything is ringing ringing ringing, but Tommy, Tommy looks into that fucking smiling mask, decides to hell with it all, and channels his pain into one last bluff: "I could kill you right now, if I wanted to."

The world seems to hold its breath. And then, Dream's eyes crinkle.

"Okay," he concedes. Nonchalant. Casual. (*Third strike.*) "But you won't."

Tommy takes a gamble even while he thinks his nose might be bleeding. "I won't. You know why I won't? I won't, because I'm leaving this prison, and—"

(*He's out.*)

Dream strikes. He topples Tommy down with surprising strength, Tommy's head banging against the obsidian flooring and sounding with an echo and oh, was Dream just waiting to do this? Yet before Tommy can speak, before he can *scream*, there's another hit. Again, again, again, on his chest and then his arm to his collarbone—all Tommy can see is *stars*.

"*Stop it!*" He's crying, screeching, *writhing* in agony, tears running down his face and mix with his blood. Tommy's limbs thrash around violently, his hands clawing at the space above him, trying to find purchase on something, trying to throw Dream away. "Stop it, stop it, *stop it!*"

In one moment of clarity onto the blurred next, Dream kneels above him, and one green eye glows underneath the pinpricks of his smiling mask. The lava creates a sunset glow around him; it makes him look like the devil.

An oddly merciful one, because in that same moment, the barrage stops. And during that time of reprieve, Tommy thinks. Even if Dream does stop for now, Tommy doubts he'll survive for more than an hour—after all, there's no bandages nor potions here, and he can feel the blood in his throat. A punctured lung and a few broken bones, at least. Dream won't treat him, and if he does, well. Once on near-equal standing, Tommy is now weaker, and Dream is not a generous sort.

Tommy will die either way.

Might as well go out on his own terms, even if his sworn enemy's the one killing him.

So Tommy says: "Look at me, right now." And Dream does.

"I don't think this revive book is real. Schlatt's fucking dead, I've seen his grave, and it's real, his corpse is there. But no matter what—if I die, if I'm revived and get out, if you stop here and let me bleed to death—you'll be stuck here forever."

He closes his eyes, feels blood in his mouth and a potato slam onto his eye,

and the server gGlitchhches.

It's a subtle thing, yet felt throughout the entire world. Akin to a shock of electricity, or the vibration of tectonic plates breaking away, or animals moving as if they were an animation and most of the in-between frames were stolen away. Lights flicker; some forget as others remember. In the void he floats in, Tommy can hear the wretched screams of Endermen who know something is *wrong*, so close yet so far. (The only reason he knows it's Endermen is because Ranboo cries like that, too, when he's burned by his own tears.)

And Tommy, despite being in the midst of life and death, feels it the most despite barely being conscious.

It feels like getting stuck mid-teleport. It feels like being shook around in a jar. It feels like a sensation overload. It feels like dying and respawning at the same time.

(If he could open his eyes, Tommy would see what could've been. Yellow roses adorning a face too pale in the midst of war. A mixture of hybrids livings together as one, a world abandoned. A timer that spells the inevitable end of a server. Videos, media, and the rise to fame.)

There are hands, soft and warm, cradling Tommy's whole being. Footsteps tap on something akin to glass, a soothing beat that calms the blond. He's shaking, a belated realization that he doesn't know the reason for.

One, two, three, four, pause.

"You're going to be okay, Tommy."

One, two, three, four, pause.

"You're going to be okay."

One, two, three, four, pause.

A shift, and Tommy feels as if he's passed through a cold curtain. He shudders.

"Shh, shh," the voice soothes. "We're—you're almost there." In a lower tone, the voice mutters, "I'll kill Dream, that power-abusing bastard." A threat. A promise.

One, two, three, four, pause.

"You'll be okay. Far, far away from that hellhole."

One, two, three, four, pause.

"You're lucky I'm fond of you. I'm gonna be in so much deep shit because of this."

One, two, three, four, pause.

"...You can't see me." It's not a question. "That's fine."

Ten drops of a liquid drench his skin, yet Tommy himself isn't wet. It burns in his right socket, the vision of gold, gold, gold burning underneath his eyelids. A finger runs over his head.

"Goodbye."

He drifts.

Tommy opens an eye to white clouds and a blue sky.

Chapter End Notes

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contrast.

Chapter Summary

tommy in the bnha world, what will he do?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy lurches when he wakes, clawing at his eye. Still screaming ~~and crying~~, he rolls around with tears streaming down his face. He gasps on his breath, his lungs burning to live, seemingly unable to take enough air in. The (phantom?) pain is *suffocating*, drowning him because *fuck*, Dream's still holding him down and he can't. *Breathe—*

"Fuck," Tommy chokes out, sobbing right after, both of these things ugly and raw. "Dream, Dream—I get it! Stop, stop, *stop*, please I'm sorry I won't do it again sir I'm sorry, I'm *sorry—*"

But then his head scrapes against something warm. Through the ringing of his ears and his mumbled pleas, Tommy can hear birds chirp distantly—and, oh, the prison also doesn't have that either. The air is warm, too, more like a nice hug than the burning, constantly-consuming lava. (His skin prickles; when was the last time he's been hugged?)

Pandora's Vault isn't warm. It's cold as its shitty warden, obsidian walls immune to the lava coating it, the rock freezing under the soles of his feet and shivering skin. It's exile tenfold, a never-ending nightmare.

This isn't Pandora's Vault.

Regaining a bit more clarity, Tommy can see glimpses of puffy cumulus clouds above his head, partially blocking a bright sun and its rays. The sky is vibrant, bright, blue as his eyes, and so very *real*. Tommy can feel its comfort wrapping around him, something he hasn't felt in ages, something more comfortable than lava, and he fucking sinks into it. Sue him for it, for not getting up and checking his surroundings immediately to see where the hell he is, but Tommy is fucking tired and exhausted and probably dead. Let him have this.

His skin tingles with the warmth—not pale, cold, nor bloody like a dead man, just scarred. The air smells fresh, not a hint of explosion residue in it. Tommy's laying down on something that isn't obsidian or grass, and finds that it's concrete as his fingertips graze it. Speaking of feeling, Tommy—he can't feel his right eye, but that's fine because. Because there's no blood, either, nothing but drying tears on his cheeks.

He takes a longer moment to soak in it like the selfish bastard he is, delighting in this not-quite relief, in the feeling of adrenaline melting away from his body; in the warmth that feels almost foreign in its gentleness; in the clean air. (In another server...?)

"...This isn't the afterlife, is it," Tommy brokenly whispers, voice hoarse. The only response he gets is the squawking of faraway birds. He groans.

Fuck. Shit. Okay. *Okay!* He can—shit, he doesn't have anything, does he? Sam has it all. Fuck.

Okay, he just. He has to look around. See where he is, what he can use. Ask what server he's in, and maybe get some help? Either way, as much as he wants to lay down and forget reality exists forever, Tommy has to get up.

With that in mind, he slowly sits up, unsure of what remaining wounds he has and unwilling to risk it. His muscles ache, and Tommy hisses once or twice as his muscles pull and stretch like he's been frozen for years, but it's better than normal. So he's sitting now, his legs flat against the ground and his arms holding himself up, when he finally manages to look around.

Tommy's on a building. One with a flat... roof? *Is* he on a roof? Well, this weird—floor, or whatever, has a raised part with a door on it, just to his left. It has a sign on it, but he isn't quite sure what it reads. The letters are just. Lines? It's... one of them is like a tower of blocks, the other just an upside-down T with an extra line, making it like an upside-down F instead. Phil had mentioned something about weird squiggly lines like this before; a different language, right?^[1]

Tommy frowns, scouring his memories, until snaps his fingers, faintly remembering when Phil had written the second letter (character?) in a different server. The man was writing because he couldn't speak the language himself. It was Japanese, if he's right.

It was... Japanese.

Oh, shit. It's *Japanese*. Tommy is fairly sure he doesn't know Japanese. *Fuck*.

He can also be sure that hey, this is definitely, one-hundred percent not the Dream SMP anymore! But then this could also be a dangerous server, one that could be fucking deadly to him right now! From what he can see, it's nothing like 2b2t, but... he can't ever be too sure of anything anymore.

Changing his attention before the panic *really* fucking settles in, Tommy finally decides to look himself over.

There's no blood. His scars are still there, marred, healed skin he never wants to see but has to. He's still wearing his trademark t-shirt and some beige shorts, along with worn shoes, socks, his tool belt—just his normal attire, except it's cleaner, lacking the blood and dirt from Tommy's time in Pandora's Vault. Flipping some of the pouches on his tool belt open, Tommy scans through them, surprised to find some items in it. A little iron, his communicator (thank *Prime*), a flint and steel, seeds, golden apples, rotten flesh, torches—wait. *Golden apples?*

Tommy grabs one out, holding it in his palms and watching its shiny, metallic exterior gleam in the light. He blinks, sets it down, rubs his left eye—no, still there. Tommy dangles it in the air by its stem, watching it sway side to side like an intrigued cat, before daring to take a bite out of it. An overwhelmingly, delightfully familiar sweet taste fills his mouth, the juices of the fruit pouring in while a surge of energy and healing come right after.

Holy *shit*. These were the real deal. Real fucking golden apples, right there in his hands.

Tommy chomps down on the rest of the fruit with haste, holding its core in his hands delicately. His body buzzes, pleasantly warm, tingling, and energized. Any pain that would've come with standing up had ebbed away, slipping out like the faint pink mist rising from his skin. Tommy feels himself slump over in relief, exhaustion and tension slipping from his shoulders for the first time in—in however long he was in Sam's prison.

He eventually stands, sighing as he puts the core back into his belt for later use, as much as he wants to tear into that, too. Because who knows? In this server, he might be allow and able to fucking... grow golden apples, or something.

Not now, though. He has to check the rest of his inventory—if it was even there.

Tommy flicks his wrist, eagerly watching as the hologram flickered to life. Though some parts of the hologram were glitched—like how there were outlying gray rectangles and missing textures—the projection was mostly intact. And, even better, there were fucking *items* in it, like seeds, carrots, arrows, enchanting bottles, a water bucket, half a stack of bread, and—and... and.

What the *fuck*. Why was the *Axe of Peace* here?!

Hastily, he taps the axe's icon in his inventory, watching it slip out of the hologram and into his hands. Tommy weighs the—holy shit—the Axe of Peace in his hands, or at least a really, really fucking good replica of it, gripping the handle and carefully swinging it around. And it, it *weighed* the same, felt the same, swung the same. It looked the same, too. With a brief scan using his communicator, all of its enchantments were there—Efficiency V, Mending, Sharpness V, and Unbreaking III.

For good measure, Tommy bashes the sharp end into the floor. The axe makes a clean cut straight through, revealing... well, darkness at the bottom, but that shit doesn't matter right now.

The Axe of Peace in his hands was fucking *real*.

Tommy snorts, chuckles, and then laughs, loud and boisterous, hysteria filling his mind. The only reason he quiets down marginally is because people can hear him even on this rooftop, but he can't stop laughing until a few minutes later. Even *then* it took him a bit to stop giggling, or smiling widely when he even glanced at the real fucking Axe of Peace.

Prime, he won't be able to get over this in his head. Out of all the things he somehow has, this included Techno's fucking *axe*. Fuck, did that mean Tommy took Techno's axe with him? Can Techno genuinely not have it anymore? Serves that bastard right!

Putting the axe back and waving his inventory away, Tommy smiles. More than anything, if this is a dangerous server, he has a chance to survive.

Speaking of which, he should get down and explore the area a bit. He needs a base, bandages, healing potions, armor, information—all of it, anything that could be useful.

Tommy tries to open the door to his left, but finds it locked. So like anyone else in his situation, he bashes it down with *his* axe, soon running down some stairs that led further down and seemed to go on for ages. This building seemed abandoned, for no one bothered Tommy for his loud footsteps, the place was grimy, and any rooms he managed to peek in were empty—maybe this could be a base? It seemed like a good one. He could have a decoy base at the first floor and then have all the actual shit scattered in the higher floors. Then again, it'd be a pain to walk the staircase over and over, or climb the walls again just to get to one thing.

It takes ages, but Tommy finally finds the door that leads to the outside. He opens it, turning his head—and then has to pause, blinking with surprise. He mutters a "what the fuck" soon enough as he watches these weird fucking machines whisk by. They moved like minecarts, yet there were no rails, and they were all multicolored, mostly in grayscale or in desaturated hues. Phil had talked about these before when he came back from another server, right? Something about an automobile, whatever that is. Weren't those called cars?

... Why was he in a place with *cars*? ~~Where did Dream send him?~~ This server was fucking showing off with their weird tech.

That's not even mentioning the shit the people are on. Some of them looked like hybrids as they passed the alleyway, and yeah, that's pretty natural in different servers, especially ones like Hypixel. But others... they weren't even *hybrids*. One man was controlling origami cranes, another had a drill for an arm, and there was a woman over there whose head was a fucking ball of *fire*?

Tommy digs into his tool belt, pulling his communicator out. He tinkers with it for a bit, seeing that most of the controls were the same, and then immediately tries to see the player list.

Error Occured.

"...What?" Tommy frowns, pressing the Tab button on the side again. The message popped up once more, red letters blaring at him as if he didn't understand the first time. He huffs, looking up. Cars(?) keep running by in front of him, and when he observes more sharply, there seemed to be different faces in each automobile.

So there were... too many players? Enough for *Sam's* tech to break? Was that even *possible*?

He tries the next command he could think of.

/msg Dream WHERE THE FUCK DID YOU PUT ME

...

Error Occured: Player Not Found.

"Oh," Tommy breathes, rereading the small statement with wide eyes. "Oh *shit*."

/msg Tubbo Help

...

Error Occured: Player Not Found.

Tommy had been walking around this city for a while. Probably for the entire day, what with the way that the sky glows a vibrant orange, dipping to a dark blue hue. No one paid him any mind, thank Prime, but he didn't really stand out compared to that person with a television head so that was a given.

He'd gathered a lot of info just walking around, honestly. People gossiped so loudly about their shitty business lives and their jobs and their coworkers and heroes and villains that Tommy's communicator with Sam's half-shoddy translator picked up a shit ton of stuff. Shit about someone named All Might and another named Endeavor and the latest villain-related incident or whatever the fuck. They talked about something called "Quirks," too—*bragged* about them, even. It was how Tommy could connect "Quirks" to the non-hybrid features people had. These "Quirks" were apparently superpowers people had gained one day. And due to that, "heroes" and "villains" were created.

Tommy almost scoffs at the thought. Heroes, villains. What fucking bullshit.

Earlier on at a random cafe, he'd managed to get access to its free Wi-Fi outside the building. Regular communicators, even without Sam's enhancements, are designed for use in any kind of server, even those that need Wi-Fi. It was once something Tommy laughed at because it was fucking useless, but now it's a W in Tommy's book. Regardless, using his communicator, Tommy searched for even more information about this weird server. Anything that he could find, at least.

For one, he was in a place called Musutafu, a city in *Japan*, which fucking sucked because now he couldn't talk to anyone. No idea how he'd learn Japanese, anyway. Maybe his clearly-British appearance was what got him the weird looks on his face.

Also, one of, if not the most popular *hero* schools was called U.A. Originally, it got Tommy's attention because everyone was talking about applying, or whatever U.A. did this time in terms of events and shit. Apparently, it had produced most of the top heroes like that man named “All Might.” The hero in question looked too strained and old in his opinion, honestly. Who wouldn't from smiling that much, all while keeping crime down to its lowest?

None of that is the point of why U.A. kept his attention, however.

With a little more research, Tommy also found out that there was a Gen Ed. course in U.A. Although the next batch of entrance exams he *could* apply to wouldn't come until next year because he has no identity as of now, *hypothetically*, if Tommy worked hard and fast enough, he could forge an identity, get enough money to live stably, and pay for the tuition fees. If Tubbo were here, it wouldn't be as hard—he was always good at tech.

Running a hand down his face, Tommy hesitantly pushes away any thoughts about his best friend. Survival first.

Now to other essential shit. There wasn't a three-life system as far as he could tell, and people don't know about respawning. Tommy didn't know if it even existed in this server. Was everyone just on one life? Did that mean that he was on one, too? Not for the first time, Tommy's fucking mad that there's no counter or anything for lives in the DreamSMP—the only time people know how many lives they're on is when they respawn.

Tommy sighs. He plucks a piece of bread from his inventory, nibbling on it as he looks around. Here, the buildings all look the same, the only difference being that instead of more buildings on the right, there was a trash-filled, probably-abandoned beach. The place he'd spawned in was far, far behind him now—he'd wandered too much to even get back, because the players in this server(?) didn't have a shred of creativity in them. How can they even stand looking at that much gray and dull blue and such, fucking—dull colors? It's going to drive Tommy mad.

He looks up again at the darkening sky, the only colorful thing. Maybe he should've kept the building as a base, but it's far too late now. If he can find an abandoned house here, he thinks, he could just stay there. Fuck, then he wouldn't know how to get food—Tommy's seen the weird paper shit people pass around, the ones with the numbers that people gave in trade for other shit.

But the beach. (But exile.)

Tommy considers his options carefully.

If he takes refuge in a stranger's home, there's high risk yet high reward. It means living with someone he can't predict, can't read, and don't truly know in trade for food, water, and shelter. It means listening to their rules and praying they're kind.

If he lives homeless on the beach, there's high risk yet low reward. It means relearning street-smarts and playing dirty. It means trusting himself, and only himself to survive. It means being free.

(If he strays from the shore, wouldn't he be giving in to Dream?)

There was no damn way Tommy was going to ask for refuge in one of the houses.

Heading to the entrance of the beach (its name on the entrance sign is Takoba Municipal Beach Park), Tommy pulls his ragged shoes and socks off. He steps onto the sand, feeling the soft, granular material sift between his toes. It was perfectly, delightfully warm, hugging his feet and latching between his toes as the blond walks deeper, soon standing among piles of trash. Metals of all sorts gleam in the soon-to-be-moonlight, sharp edges and rusted curves highlighted. (Tubbo would love to tinker with the broken machines.)

Tommy weaves through the junk with ease until he stood in front of the shore, his hands shaking and his heart thumping as he puts away the half-eaten remains of his bread.

The wind ruffles his hair. Tommy closes his eyes and takes a breath, relishing in the fresh, salty air so different from the overwhelming city-smell or the charred walls of an obsidian prison. "This isn't fucking exile," he murmurs, "Nor is it Pogtopia. Or L'Manburg. I am free."

He huffed. "I'm a big fucking man, is what I am. I can live on this fucking shore. Dream's just a stupid, manipulative bastard. Wilbur, less so. I won't come back, because the revive book isn't real. I am free." To where the sea spray tickles his skin, Tommy stands, smiling, and feels more free than he's ever been.

"FUCK YOU, BITCH BOY!"

Chapter End Notes

^[1]the japanese characters tommy saw are the kanji for rooftop: "屋上" thank you google translate^{[[return to text](#)]}

edited aug. 3 2022 6:49PM

edited again mar. 7 2023 22:19/10:19PM (not done yet, but am tired. left off at "Not now, though. He has to check the rest of his inventory—if it was even there.")

—now finished on mar. 8 2023 6:40

edited Again on mar. 10 2023 14:41/2:41PM because i'm Stupid and someone found a plot hole whOOPS! Um anyway it was found by jhanyh !! tysm :]

break-in.

Chapter Summary

because Of Course tommy can't have peace for long

Chapter Notes

this was written by someone who doesn't know Anything abt coffee so like—

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

For the small cafe of Tari's Coffee, this morning was as peaceful as usual. A soft Lo-Fi playlist plays throughout the cafe while orange lights casts a warm glow on the interior, creating a comfortable, light atmosphere. Hot coffee brews filled the air with delicious smells, mixing with those of the small baked goods and snacks on display cases and stands. The coldness of February's snow^[1] made the pleasantly warm temperature of the shop all the better. Adding the extra greenery in the corners and extra spaces, along with smaller, cottage-like details, and it seemed like a home.

Tommy looks outside the windows of the cafe, watching people walk along. He soon moves on to watering the potted foliage nearby with a watering can and a sigh, his fingers itching.

Tommy isn't made for working slowly like this. He's used to fast-paced action, to *war*, to constantly thinking about strategies and how to live on to the next day, never stopping. This is near *unbearable*, and Tommy scarcely gets how Techno enjoyed peace before—well. Never mind that.

For now, though, he'd make do with what he has, especially because he probably can't get into U.A. anyway. After all, Tommy doesn't know how to create an identity that would say that he's fifteen when he's about seventeen—Tubbo isn't here, and who'd accept a homeless seventeen year old into their school?

It's led him here, working for the owner of this cafe—Tari, a lady whom Tommy found to be pretty chill. She'd offered him the full-time job because he looks "pitiful as hell," which. He fucking *isn't*, but Tommy hadn't hesitated to take it with the previous question in mind.

It's great for him anyhow. This was the same cafe he'd constantly use for free Wi-Fi, and having a job here would make things easier. *Especially* so when the regulars had helped him with his Japanese, one of them having an American—*eugh*—for a husband. Thanks to them, he's now able to speak and write the basics whilst with an accent and with shaky characters respectively.

They had also taught him basic Japanese etiquette and more about the world around him. In turn, Tommy would help them with English, do bits of work around the cafe, listen to them rant, and give them advice.

Three other things had appeared over the past month, one being his eyepatch. At the reminder, Tommy reaches up, slipping his finger under the single band and tugging on it lightly. The hand-made item was a slightly-desaturated navy blue and rimmed with gold near the edges. One of the regulars, a woman with marriage issues, had asked him what his hobbies were after he gave advice to sort her problems out. When Tommy mentioned he knew how to sew, the next day she had come by and gave him several sewing materials, including a container to place it in and some fabric to use. He'd made the eyepatch soon after and declared her one of the only women ever.^[2]

Anyway, Tommy had it for a reason.

One day, as he washed his clothes in Takoda, he'd seen his reflection for the first time. Tommy thought he'd looked the same before Dream had... before the incident since he only felt a bit of lingering numbness where his injuries were, so he hadn't bothered truly looking at his face. But in the reflection of the water, Tommy had found that his right eye had *changed*.

What was once another sapphire eye was a, a fucking texture error, or whatever Sam called it: four squares where his iris should've been, two of the squares, one on the top left and the other on the bottom right, a strikingly hot pink across the other two that were an inky black. He had no pupil, yet Tommy could see just fine. In addition, there was a thin, meandering scar surrounding his eye in a misshapen circle. Unfortunately, it was large enough to be noticeable—Tommy had wondered just how long the changes had been there, and *shit*, was *that* why people stared at his face when he first got here?

(When he'd asked the next day, everyone told him they thought it was an accident from his quirk drawback, and that both his weird eye and his scar had been there ever since he came in the cafe. He would've tried to get colored eye contacts instead of an eye-patch, but he didn't know if they'd work and who sells them in the area.)

The next thing was something he delighted in: a blunt weapon. More specifically, a steel, collapsible bo staff that Tommy had found in the deepest pits of Takoda that wouldn't be as deadly or threatening than the Axe of Peace. If he were attacked, he didn't want to become a criminal by using the chopper, so this was pretty fucking pogchamp.

It was a bit rusted after being constantly sloshed by the sea waves for so long and covered under layers of sand, but! With a bit of water, borrowed baking soda, three melted plastic bins, and time, it was as good as new! The thing was light, easy to maneuver, and fun to play with, so Tommy kept it. ~~He doesn't want to kill anyone anymore, too.~~

Now, on the weekends due to working on the weekdays, he uses his time to move around Takoda's rough terrain with the staff like a vaulting pole, familiarizing himself with the weapon. Later on, he started to work on agility and speed when it came to attacking by throwing several cans into the air and trying to hit them all. One of the customers (Prime, he has to learn their names) had a pitching machine that they planned to sell—Tommy had planned on "borrowing" it to help him train.

Speaking of machines! Tommy had also found a pristine radio in the middle of a broken tire, and it still worked which was fucking poggers! The audio's a bit grainy, but that didn't matter. He *finally* has something to keep his thoughts from going awry. (He'll never admit it, either, but Tommy regularly listens to Present Mic's radio show at night. He's taken a slight liking to the man, maybe due to how they're possible kindred spirits...)

The final thing, more of a realization than anything, was how Tommy didn't... *miss* the DreamSMP as much as he should. Tubbo, Techno, Wilbur, Phil, even Ranboo... he does miss them, but it's—different, now.

In this weird server, there are no mobs. There are villains instead, but there are heroes, too. People who save others, who rise up and create safety when there isn't any. There is no need to constantly be on-guard, or carry a weapon wherever, or be forced to learn how to fight as a child, because almost always will a hero be there to help. Of course, the system is heavily flawed from what Tommy knows, but it's better than knowing that the only one that can help a person is themselves—better than losing all hope entirely.

In Takoda, Tommy can curse as much as he wants, scream his lungs out, run around, act childish and feral and do dangerous shit—and no one will reprimand him. No one will tell him to shut up, or attack him, or remind him to not act like so because there is a war, a *revolution* he has to be in. He has no preceding reputation of making mistakes that cost him his lives and so many others. There are no regulations, restrictions, or any expectations—he can be a child, for once.

In Tari's cafe, he doesn't have to think of betrayals and who to trust. The customers don't prod into his past or mind his cursing and his flinches, and in turn he doesn't mind listening. The job itself is therapeutic and nice, even with the urge to keep doing something. He just has to brew coffee, man the cash register, make light snacks, collect tips, and clean. No training, no warfare, no strategizing or considering grudges, handling the lives of everyone he knows and those he doesn't. Also, the constant movement and its distractions help on low days when Tommy can barely force himself up. Greeting the customers and hearing them talk when he can't is just an extra bonus.

As much as he doesn't want to admit, Japan seemed more like a home than the DreamSMP. Because the DreamSMP is a constant war-zone, where any wrong step and he'll be ripped apart by the very people he called friends—in this server, he almost feels safe.

Tommy isn't too sure how to feel about that. That's a problem for future-him, anyway.

And it's here, when he's finally stopped recollecting and sorting his shit out, that a sense of dread slams his gut, a shiver rolling down his spine.

He pauses on his way to a table, taking a glance outside as his gut feeling worsens. Tommy almost groans—it's eight in the morning on a fucking *Tuesday*, he doesn't want to deal with this right now.

Tommy knows to trust his gut more than anything, though, so he hastens his movements, setting a large cup of black coffee on a table next to a tired, haggard-looking man with a grey scarf. With a spin on his heel, Tommy speed-walks to the front counter. He puts his (not shaking, no) hands in the pockets of his black apron as he stands behind the cash register once more. His eye pins itself to the front door, unwavering and sharp.

A minute passes, if he's counted the sixty ticks of a distant clock somewhere in the cafe. Tommy brushes some of his hair from his eyes and keeps waiting.

The windows shatter. Glass explodes, shards spilling on the wooden floor as customers scream. Shuffling and chaos follow when they scramble further into the cafe, staring fearfully and gasping as three people clad in black walk in. (*Wow*, Tommy thinks. *Way to be discrete.*) Two hold empty sacks while the other raises a gloved hand. Rapidly, the glass fragments on the ground shape-shift, combining and molding together to create a long, translucent knife. It goes right into the leader's hands.

Oh, Prime. He's in one of these cliché fuckin' *story robberies* Tari despises. Tommy scowls; who does a fucking robbery this early, anyway? In *plain sight*, too! And why a cafe? Tommy would've planned this shit out *much* better.

The robber in front of the other two, presumably the leader of the trio, starts talking. But Tommy's already fed up, having turned around and shuffling things in a cabinet. Distantly, he can hear them addressing him—something about stopping where he was and getting the money, blah blah blah—but he's too busy pulling out the rest of the thickly-knitted rope. Tari used it for aesthetic shit around the cafe and stored the leftovers here; though he has thought of strangling many people Tari called "Karens" with it, he never thought he'd have a use for it until now.

"Hey," the lead robber barks again. Tommy turns around and casually begins to unknot the long cord. There's a couple more glass knives hovering in the air pointed at him, he finds. Their lackeys have stopped shoving things in their bags to look at him, too, their stares a lot less sharp compared to the tips of the knives. One of them is playing with strings—probably their Quirk. "I told you to get the money or I'll kill you!"

Tommy gave them a snort, setting the untied bundle of rope on the ground after moving ahead of the front counter. He puts his hands behind his back, flicking his wrist. "As if I'll listen to you, you fucking bitch. Who starts a robbery this early? Shitty no-lives like you, that's who. Also, make better threats, alright—people threaten me with death too much."

The robber looked at him with horror. "What—"

Tommy pounces forwards, ducking low enough to dodge a knife. He feints to the right with his foot, distracting the leader to pull his bo staff out of his inventory and extend it with a quick *click*! Transitioning with ease and adjusting his balance, he slams it into the robber's left side—or where the liver should be.

He'd found out this little trick during one of Techno's sparring lessons when the man had used it on him, during Pogtopia. After Tommy had stopped writhing in pain, the piglin-hybrid explained that a hit to the liver was an easy way to defeat a foe when he was too lazy to fight or in a hurry. That due to it being the center of blood circulation, or some shit like that, it would cause a shock when hit and make them go into excruciating pain.

"In the language of violence," he told him, *"we don't have to play nice."* Thank Prime Tommy remembered the move—he doubted he could forget anyway, with how much Techno had *literally* beat it into him.

As expected, the robber crumbled. They choked out a strangled little noise before stumbling to the side and falling to the floor, knocked out cold. The glass knives fell with them, fragmenting once more with an ear-grating shatter. Some shards had shot out and grazed Tommy's skin, and *no no no no Dream was here and he's back in the prison cell and Dream's killing him DREAM'S KILLING HIM*—but Tommy quickly crammed some remaining bread pieces from his inventory into his mouth. Thankfully, the cuts started to heal, very faint scars in their places.^[3]

"Fuck you, bitch," he mutters. Tommy turns to the closest robber, then, who was near the side of the front counter. Said robber was literally shaking, their hands dropping their sack as they morphed into crab-like appendages. "I-I'll kill you!" They stutter.

Too late for that. Grabbing the rope on the ground with the edge of his staff, Tommy held it with one hand and ran forwards. The robber lifted their arms up to their head in an X-formation. However, that just made a surefire strike to their solar plexus all the more easier to do.

So Tommy did. He rams the edge of his weapon into the dude's solar plexus, remotely hearing them take a large, sharp intake of air. He took this moment to spin the robber around, using the rope to tie their arms tightly behind their back.

Well, he would have. A long, grey scarf had done it first, tying the robber into a bundle. Someone wrenched them behind the teen with the scarf. Tommy spun and scrambled back, watching with awe as the haggard-looking man that he'd served before this shitty incident quickly knocked the robber out. The last robber was already tied up with their own Quirk—he only noticed when the man (hero?) literally dragged them over.

"Holy shit," The teen whispers giddily, putting his staff and leftover rope in his inventory. That was so fucking poggers and cool and *amazing*. He can't help but stare as the man walks towards him, taking a small container out and dropping some liquid into his eyes beforehand. (The bottle looks familiar. Phil got that for Wil, usually—eyedrops, they're called?)

"Are you hurt anywhere?" The hero(?) asks, their voice gravely and *way* too fucking close. Tommy flinches, jerking back to see the man directly in front of him. "Sorry," Tommy says a little too quickly. "I'm fine."

The man frowns deeper than he usually does. Tommy raises his arms up, mimicking his frown. "See? The glass cuts are fucking gone—I'm fine, alright?"

One of the customers must've called the police while they were fighting, because the little staredown he and The Man enter lets Tommy recognize the sirens flashing outside. There were a few officers checking in on people; one of them called out, "Eraserhead? We need you over here for a bit." Breaking eye-contact with Tommy, the most-definitely-a-hero grumbles before turning around and moving towards the officer's voice.

Tommy blinks. Eraserhead? Not the weirdest name he's heard, but okay.

As people move around him, Tommy goes to put the remaining rope away. He drifts, his hands moving on their own as he was thinking about the (albeit short) fight he had.

Tari's Coffee is definitely a place precious to him. It holds many memories and has helped him so much in this strange server—this strange *modded realm*, really, because Tommy will be damned if this shit's a regular server. And he knows he protects everything close to him like his entire being is on the line, fighting for it with tooth and nail, so him defeating at least one of the robbers made sense.

But the more Tommy thinks about it, the more the thought that he wanted to protect the *people* made sense, too, even if most of them were strangers. Their things were being stolen by petty thieves and if he or Eraserhead hadn't been there, they might've gotten away with it.

So here, Tommy had been a hero. For the smallest amount of time, he'd been a hero.

And it had felt good. Fighting and helping and *saving*—despite his trauma of pain, of death and war and battles and blood, he'd felt—*good*. Like, he's reformed or some shit.

In the Dream SMP, there were no heroes. Tommy himself isn't one. Of course, no one is entirely black or white because everyone's flawed in some way, even in this server. But the difference is that no one had even tried to save him when he was his worst, when he needed a hero—exile is a prime example of that.

And there are heroes in this weird server, but most of them focus on bigger things. Larger incidents, louder events, huge crimes. They zone in on fame and money, fortune and attention, showing off their quirks and seeing who's better on hero rankings to brag. The majority care about nothing but themselves.

Tommy makes a decision as he listens to the thankfulness of the remaining customers and answers the questions of the police.

He isn't a hero. Yet he'll play the role so that the victims of crimes away from the spotlight can have one.

Chapter End Notes

1. tommy came here in early january, a few months before izuku starts his training, and atm it's mid-late february. 'm basing the time based on an [old fanmade reddit post on the bnha timeline](#), so,,,[\[return to text\]](#)

2. reference to TommyInnit's unbeatable method of avoiding sudden death by eneli, 'm positive you already know abt it washgja,,,,, so,,,[\[return to text\]](#)

3. the minecraft mechanic when your hunger bar is full and you start to heal is still there, its just tommy's inventory's appearance that's glitched[\[return to text\]](#)

edited aug. 3 2022 6:57PM

edited mar. 8 2023 throughout several hours. how tf do yall read and reread this ??? its god awful

vigilantism.

Chapter Summary

vigilante tommy!

Chapter Notes

idk Anythin abt fabrics so there's gonna be a lot of inaccuracies n reiterations so uh—

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

With a grunt, Tommy slumps on the tire he's sitting on. It's been almost a day since the robbery, Tari having forced him to take a break "or else she'd make him," and Tommy's learnt to respect women for a reason, so he'd (*reluctantly*) went back to Takoda and slept. With his hand holding his chin, this is a rare quiet moment as he thinks. Tommy almost starts gnawing on his nails, but taps his staff—now named Clara, because why the fuck not—against the rubber instead.

How the ever-loving fuck was he going to make a vigilante costume?

Despite having money from work (ugh, he sounds so fucking *old*), it probably isn't enough to get a high-quality suit or some shit like that. Tommy is no Tubbo—he can't work with metal scraps like his best friend can. (He dismisses the sharp pang of longing for his best friend with an ease that scares him.)

And sure, he could use something plain like a hoodie, mask, and flexible pants for the base, but he doesn't know who'd even sell metal plating for his weak points around here. Using books as armor would be a pain to move in and a hassle to get and put on, even if they'd block projectiles and make him more imposing or some shit. Going to the black market to get proper armor, wherever that would be in this server, would be too risky. Finally, there's no abundance of trees, and the trees here are too thin and old to make anything out of it. Apparently, it's also *illegal* to break trees without permission.

Tommy scoffs. That's fucking senseless, that is.

...And it reminds him of how *little* he truly knows about this server. Having been here for months hadn't helped much except teach him the language, mannerisms, and people. Unlike the Dream SMP, there were different laws and rules set in place, nothing like the self-suspended and generally loose rules in the SMP. And there were also an unknown amount of people, meaning an unknown amount of villains *and* heroes he'd have to avoid if he still wanted to do this. No enemies nor allies—a fresh, blank canvas. No backup.

No help.

Sighing, Tommy stands, stretching his limbs out. His eye runs over his discolored skin and thinner scars, fingers grazing its multitude of rough textures and picking at small scabs. "I'm Tommy-fucking-

Innit," he grumbles, saying these words aloud to make them more real, more *true*, "and I've survived so much shit without much help. Who says I can't do that now?" He picks Clara up, puts her into his inventory, grabs whatever savings he has, and leaves.

He's picked out something plain for a costume—the cheapest things he could find and afford, as well as best suited for the dark. A hoodie, a basic, hard-fabric masquerade mask, a pair of long finger-less gloves, and another covering for the lower half of his face. Along with that, some slightly loose pants and a pair of red sneakers—he already has a tool-belt. All of these are either dark grey or black besides some extra red fabrics (because people might say that blue would fit with his eye, the only thing that's going to be visible, and to them, he says fuck off, because red is a great color and he will sew it on no matter what.) If his end goal were different, Tommy wouldn't have gotten all black, yet he wasn't going to be a vigilante for attention or fame.

Regardless, he silently cringed as he left the store, fidgeting with the straps of the plastic bag his stuff was in. Prime, this was so fucking weirdchamp. Not as bad as other shit he's bought before, but still up there.

At another store, the soon-to-be vigilante gets a few rolls of bandages and a med-kit, distantly noticing the questionable looks he's given in the aisles and the checkout. Presumably more than usual, for how homeless and ragged he probably looks, and how suspicious these clothes are. He doesn't really pay attention to any looks he gets, though—Tommy just rolls his eye and munches on some bread in his inventory as he returns to Takoda. Nosy bitches.

Either way, he puts his purchases away and changes into the "costume" despite wearing his original clothes underneath; his eyepatch, too. He grabs a cracked full-body mirror resting by the side to see his reflection fully. And he looks... fine, for someone who looks like they're either extremely suspicious, a cliché villain, or a drug dealer. If he hid his hair, Tommy would be like those brainless robbers. Not the best, but he can manage.

Tommy rolls his shoulders and watches the mirror copy it, before reeling his arm back and forth. He turns and twists, the clothing perfectly loose. Even does a few practice kicks and swings in front of himself, finding that it's breathable. Maybe he should add a pocket in his sneakers. And put some red lining to both the masks and the hoodie.

Tommy stares at himself for a bit longer.

...His eye looks fucking unnerving. He puts a hand under and above his eye, lightly pulling the skin to reveal most of his new iris, and leans in to observe it. There's no pupil or shine, though he can see perfectly fine. The thin scar around it gives a quiet phantom pain to the last time Tommy was on the SMP, but otherwise, it's numb. When he's close enough to the glass that the iris fucking *reflects* a hot-pink light off the mirror, he backs away.

Yeah, okay, he needs another type of eye-patch for this, 'cause fighting with something limiting his vision is a no. He could put some buckram fabric and sew it in his eye mask. Would that be enough to hide the glow? Tommy mentally takes note to search Takoda for a sewing machine, because *Prime*, he'll probably have to do a lot of sewing later on.

Hm. Blocking it out entirely would become a weak point. Maybe someone at Tari's would have some colored contacts? Yet Wilbur had once said that it was a delicate process in Pogtopia. When his eyes started flickering red...

He settles on just using gray buckram fabric.

Satisfied with what he has, Tommy stands there for a moment, thinking. Should he go train some more? Research local crimes? Map the area out to make a patrol line? Stop a few muggings or some shit right now? Develop his vigilante persona more?

What should he even name himself? TommyInnit? Big T? Theseus? (That one goes out the window.) Should he just let people name him?

Why not? The nation he loved was named L'Manburg. His house in his first exile was fucking "Pogtopia." His residence in—exile was named Logstedshire, his tent "tnret." As much as Tommy would protest that those were *perfectly fine and good* names because they fucking *were*, others wouldn't agree. Especially if he just named himself Wife Haver and he appeared on news headlines.

To not give away his voice, maybe he should just keep silent. Someone at Tari's probably knows JSL.

Okay, back to the game plan, whatever that was. He should explore the city or at least the nearby neighborhoods. Search for crime rates, common areas for said crimes, and start small as much as he didn't want to. Meet the people and gain some connections if available—that's if Tommy doesn't fuck up first. Do that a few times or so and mark out the area internally.

His triggers, however... would be difficult to deal with. Tommy doesn't want to enter a fight only to have a panic attack that leaves him vulnerable. Puffy and Sam's therapy^[1] isn't gonna help him for shit now besides for a few breathing techniques, ever since the warden left the blond with *him*. But because Tommy's a big fucking man, he'll push through. Somehow. He's always had to, so how would living in a new world change that?

Either way, soon he can stop some *crime*. (How ironic it is, that he goes from causing crime to preventing it.)

Tommy grins.

A week later, at the beginning of March, a headline appears on the news.

NEW VIGILANTE APPEARS IN MUSUTAFU

Stars twinkle in the inky black night as the moon beams down outside an abandoned bar. The ground is littered with trash, staining the establishment's brick walls nearby, grime and dirt and foliage weaving through the bricks' thin cracks. The warm lights under its striped, dark-green shop canopy shudder, flickering sporadically. It reeks of alcohol, a few bottles too much, and mistakes.

A crowd surrounds two people, one holding a bottle and swishing it this way and that, the other stumbling on their feet but with their fists up. Both of their faces are flushed red, the alcohol they've consumed rendering the cheers and cries of their audience as white noise.

"Fight! Fight! Fight!" They yell with sharp teeth and rotting breaths, for the ones too terrified to call for help have already left. Money is placed, eyes are watching, cameras are rolling. The two drunks stare at each other like lions competing, eyes never veering off of their opponent. And yet they slur their jeers and blink so sluggishly that they're barely coherent. Either they'll be too sluggish to get a punch in or too swift to almost kill.

They slam into each other, the crowd roaring in delight while they tumble. Mud and grass stain their clothing, but the fighters attack one another regardless, cursing and spitting insults in gibberish only

they faintly understand. One has their tooth knocked out, the other gets a bloody nose. Bruises litter their skin, blood bleeding sluggishly from cuts covered in dirt, yet no one moves to stop them, rejoicing instead.

A shout ruins it all. "Dusk!"

And, well, that's no use and very not poggers; Tommy's already started ruining this "party" anyway. He should've come earlier but he couldn't, thanks to that mugging that popped up out of who fucking *knows* where. The strong stench of alcohol and the instant screams surrounding him do make him flinch, though it's subtle in the chaos.

He leaps down and slams the brawling drunks down, one with a swift low sweep to the feet, the other with a quick hit to the back of the knee as Tommy got up. He doesn't make a sound as he puts them into submission, twisting Clara to knock both of them out at once. Under the racket of the screams and the thumping of fleeing feet, Tommy sighs.

Prime, what was this? The fifth time this week that this shit's happened? Couldn't these dickheads give Tommy a break? This place wasn't even on his patrol route! Nearby, sure, but still!

Tommy takes a sticky note out of his inventory along with a pen, quickly scrawling out:

investigate this place more often bitches. 5th time this week

Tommy plasters the paper on the backs of one of the unconscious men, already hearing the wails of sirens nearby. He hastily pushes himself back and up a nearby building using its fire escape, launching himself across the rooftops. And wow, when did that become so normal? When did leaping through the night go from an invitation to death and darker times to freedom?

It's only been a month and Tommy feels different. Taken by this like fish to water. (*Maybe*, a nagging part of him whispers, *it's because he hasn't had the chance to truly live, always adapting to war and blood and fighting explosions screamsbetrayallossfear—and now that he can, he thrives.*) Though a gradual process, heights remind Tommy less and less of exile, and the dark of the night doesn't feel so claustrophobic (though he still took a break near some light every once in a while). He's starting to get more thrilled at going out and being a hero, too!

Speaking of which, Tommy's been getting noticed more and more by the media. He doesn't leave a name in any sticky note he sends out, and so the public has created several vigilante names for him. The most common ones being Dusk, Red, and Hermes. On occasion, he does get called the Grim Reaper—or just Reaper for short.

(Days before, Tommy had looked up who Hermes was. He thought that it fit him—anything but Theseus would be fine.)

As for the Grim Reaper name...

Unsurprisingly enough, there are no heroes around the poorer parts of Japan, and more injured in dark alleyways taking their dying breaths. So in between patrols Tommy takes some time scouring the city and along his patrol route to patch people up. Or, if it's too late, stay there and hold their hand until they pass. Some people see him and watch, but he doesn't care.

It's what Tommy would've wanted for himself.

Tommy shakes his head, getting closer and closer to Takoda and *technically*, the start of his patrol. He pauses to check his communicator—around five in the morning already, huh? Patrol's over, and as much as he wants to continue, Tari and everyone else would ask about his inevitable exhaustion if he didn't stop now.

Utilizing another fire escape, Tommy slides down into another alleyway and takes off his vigilante costume in seconds, revealing some casual clothing. This acts as a method to get heroes off his trail when he'd see one, though it hasn't happened yet; if he saw one, he could just take his costume off and act casual. The vigilante-now-totally-innocent-civilian bundles his costume up into a messy ball as he walks out, hastily moving to the entrance of Takoda and practically relaxing within its junkyard.

Tommy laughs in front of the stars, something carefree, light, and new. If he's never felt freedom before—hell, if he's never started to heal like Puffy said, this would be it.

And, of course, like everything in his life, that won't last.

Chapter End Notes

1. accidentally forgot abt how the therapy didn't happen until After the prison, but please pretend it did for the sake of this fic wajghadha,,,,,[\[return to text\]](#)

edited mar. 8 2023 14:27/2:17PM

carmine.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Tommy," Tari starts, and already Tommy knows he's *fucked*.

She's taken her time to visit her cafe today. She has *That Tone*, and when Tommy looks at her, her face is scrunched in suspicion, fear, and concern, with a frown to top it all off. Her brown eyes seem to bore into Tommy's very soul that nearly makes him shiver. Tari's aura makes him freeze despite her being 5'4, short compared to Tommy's 6'3 stature.^[1] There's a hand on her hip, her body leaning against the counter a bit, and Tommy knows he's caught for *something*. Not the coffee he's just spilt, though—he always does that, what with his shaky fucking hands.

He smiles at her on instinct, staring at Tari wide-eyed. Tommy, maintaining eye-contact, sets the coffee cup down as well as a towel he brought to clean the small cup, it having spilled earlier due to the permanent tremor in his hands the SMP gave him. Nerve damage or some shit—something both respawns and totems couldn't heal, for all the poetics people wax about them.

Either way, Tubbo's taught Tommy to fear short people from the few instances he's made the moobloom-hybrid panic for him. Adding that Tommy's been there, once, in a rare instance where Tari was fucking terrifying and, well. That's why he's scared. (No, no, not because Dream reprimanded Tommy just like that, with that convincing disappointed tone and act, netherite armor and weapons gleaming as he picks up his sword with some TNT and a flint 'n' steel and—

Tari will not hurt me, Tommy repeats like a mantra in his head. *Tari will not hurt me*. It's not an oath, a promise, a condition in a deal, nor a declaration; it's the truth.)

"Tommy," she repeats more gently, slowly setting a hand on his shoulder. It snaps him out of it, making him jump in the process.

"...Y-Yeah, Big T?"

Tari smiles just like how Tubbo would, yet it still portrays a bit of anger and disappointment. He'll never admit it, but Tommy shies away just a bit. "Why, pray tell, are there bandages around your arms? And why haven't you told me, or gone to the hospital to get them checked?"

Ah.

Tommy looks down; there, a little part of his bandaged forearm revealed by his long-sleeved uniform. It's a bit stained from the leaked americano, but the strips of fabric intertwining themselves along his arm is glaringly clear. Tommy lets his hand hover over it, as if to hide it like a secret despite it being revealed.

Did he not roll the sleeve down enough when he washed his hands? Shit.

"Tommy," Tari stresses. Tommy looks around, grinning sheepishly; thank Prime the cafe's empty at the moment.

"Well you see, Big Man," he begins eloquently, picking at the edges of his bandages. The coffee seeps into the fabrics like ink to paper. It's not a pretty brown. It looks like dried blood. "I'm *fine*! These

were just covering up my old scars from before!"

...Not exactly the truth, but *most* of it. It was more like the wounds from his vigilante rounds were light, just a few bruises from blocks Clara couldn't get because she was stopping something else, but he's a fucking pussy, so he got scared. So the only thing keeping Tommy from panicking even now because *Dream was back again fuck fuck oh Prime when the admin finds him Tommy's going to die again no no no no NO*—was to wrap them tightly until they felt trapped. As well as stuff a few golden apple slices in his mouth (turns out they have the same effect as the *full* apple, which, wow. He could've saved so many more with that tip) for the regeneration even when he *knows* he shouldn't be wasting them.

She'll understand regardless; Tari knows a bit about the DreamSMP. It was a spur of the moment decision when Tommy told her a few pieces about the server—just vague things like "the war" and "the betrayal." After all, the woman has given him so much shit for free, and he wouldn't—*couldn't* just accept free things. Everything comes with a price, the entire history of the DreamSMP being proof enough. Tommy didn't have anything of good value on him (besides the golden apples; he's still waiting to see if a seed will grown them and not normal ones), or anything that he was willing to give that he held value to, so information it was.

As expected, the dark-skinned woman softens. She nods, a look of understanding (not pity, *not* pity) on her face. "Okay, Tommy. Just... We haven't interacted much, but if you run out of bandages or something, I got some. And tell me when it's a low day or when it's too much, alright?"

Tommy stares at her, observant eyes searching for any lies. He... he doesn't really trust Tari as much as he wants to—probably won't trust anyone as much as he trusts Tubbo or had trusted Wilbur ever again—but...

Slowly, he smiles; it's a small but genuine one. "Alright, Big T. Promise."

"Anyway, *Tarzan*," Tommy jokingly says as he cleans the marble counter-top, "what brings you here to *my* humble cafe?"

Tari huffs, but she's smiling too. "First of all, I'm not Tarzan; men stink."

"You are so correct, Tari Evergreen. Women are poggers, the best, the absolute greatest. That's why I'm the Wife Haver, and how I'm so powerful." Tommy passes a cup of coffee to her, an extra cappuccino made on impulse beforehand.

"Thank you." Tari sighs after she sips the cup. "For both the cappuchino and for speaking truths. Second, just because the regulars adore you enough to constantly give you shit, especially when you give them things back, doesn't mean you own the place. Third, this ain't a 'humble cafe' anymore—you're too much of a chaotic little gremlin for that."

Tommy sputters. "I'm not a fucking little gremlin! I'm the biggest, most *maturest* man you've ever met!" Then, he stops, eyes wide with regret and an apology on his tongue. Oh Prime, was that too much? What was Tari gonna do?

"Sure," The owner drawls with a lilt of her lips. Tommy relaxes—he's forgiven. It's okay. He's just overreacting because of nerves. "I believe you, little man."

"Fuck off, bitch!"

"Moving on," the woman announces, setting her partially-empty cup down with a quiet *clink*. She looks down at the fluffy froth on top of her drink, her posture straightening. "The thing I wanted to talk about. There's a sludge villain running around somewhere in this area. Appears near or out of manhole covers, sewer grates, that type of shit. It's—he? They? They've been stealing and robbing cash—petty crimes and such."

Tommy pauses, his head turning to Tari with intrigue. "This has been going on for a few weeks too many, more stores and shops being stolen from as time passes." She continues. "The villain always goes to the gutter for an escape route and constantly shifts areas; people are saying this one's next. Just be prepared to run away if he comes here, or fight if needed. Suggest you search him up, too."

Her warning delivered, Tari's posture relaxes, a smirk back on her face. "Who knows? Maybe you could just beat him like you did those robbers, hm? There's a video going around lots—probably some memes, too. That was on the news for days, by the way; for social media, it's still going."

Tommy gapes. It goes unnoticed when he soon grins and lightly pounds his chest, exclaiming, "If they come here, they've got nothing on Big Man Tommy Innit!"

Tari laughs with mirth. "Sure, little man."

"I'm not a fucking little man!"

Tommy starts bringing his vigilante suit to work in an old duffel bag that still smells like seaweed and a small hint of motor oil.

He can't help it. It's just, when Tommy would wake up and set off to the cafe, he'd think about the place severely wrecked. He'd think about a sludge monstrosity with bulging red eyes and a pair of sclera a sickening yellow. Something with the body of tainted green and a smile of too many sharp teeth, and ~~he thinks of Dream~~ and. He blanks. One moment he exits Takoda, the next he's dragging himself back to his costume, where it lay hidden in a little nook to the side, with a random bag in his hands to stuff it in.

The bag's strap feels like a heavy weight on his shoulders that burns on his side, yet Tommy brings it to and fro the coffee shop. Of course, people ask what's up, but Tommy can only respond that it holds something important to him without outright lying. It's a lame, weak excuse spoken in a whisper, something so unlike him, but it works for most if only for how serious he may look. If it doesn't, Tommy will always refuse to budge.

Even if Eraserhead, now another regular after the robbery, comes early in the morning and stares and stares at Tommy like he's figuring out a puzzle.

(Dream stared like that in the prison, calculative and cold. Tommy knows they aren't the same, but he can't help a flinch or two around that man.)

Tommy knows he shouldn't get attached to this small safe place; every single other was taken away. Plus, the sludge villain only does petty things like stealing and shit, so why worry so much? Yet he clenches the handle of the bag and moves a bit faster through the crowds—because Tommy is nothing if not protective, and he will do anything for this shelter, even if it's temporary.

April's just started like a few days ago, and Prime, Tommy can already feel dread swirling in his gut.

The cold, unsettling sense of something amiss has him on edge. Hell, even the regulars aren't fooled, presumably from the occasional worried glance and the continued pressing questions. Tommy just responds like it's any other day, deflecting questions horribly, not breaking his customer-service facade for a second. Even that's barely together with how his eye won't stop twitching and his smile is a bit too tight.

"I told you I'm fine, dickhead," Tommy grumbles for the nth time that afternoon. He practically shoves their to-go order in the customer's arms. The man in front of him frowns in doubt before hesitantly turning around with his order and leaving. Tommy sighs; Prime, he just wants this feeling to go away already.

Taking his own coffee (he should really drink tea more) and taking a sip, he sighs in slight contentment. No wonder Wilbur liked this so much.

Tommy looks out the door and wonders when he's gotten used to so much peace—



TNT rains down from an obsidian grid, fires alight, in their smoke carrying the wails and pleas of thousands. People are killed by Withers or by their own protectors, a myriad of confusion in the masses. The corpses of hounds and citizens alike pile up on bloodied grounds, something that would make normal teenagers around Tommy's age puke. And yet three stand above it all, three people Tommy once considered friends: the Masked Apotheosis Dream, the Blood God Technoblade, and the Angel of Death Philza.

They laugh and laugh, preaching of consequences and betrayal; of one's spiral down the clutches of insanity; of their anarchy and destruction, destruction, destruction. They crave for the walls of L'Manburg—of Tommy's fucking home—and everything it stands for to be torn down just like the anarchists' trust. They illustrate stories about Theseus and Icarus and all of these Greek Gods that Tommy has never heard, and they finish with a name for this day: Doomsday.

It's the name for the desecration and chaos they have caused, burned within the pages of history with ink that bleeds through them. And yet.

Doomsday is not that; in fact, it is silent. Doomsday is the flickers of fight in a head-strong boy—a child with a smile as bright as the sun, who always knew that there is hope somewhere—diminishing. Doomsday is the last piece of innocence that falls from his eyes; Doomsday is the realization that even his pseudo-family isn't on his side—they didn't even glance at his views. Doomsday is the thought that he should never trust or love again, yet it will be futile because he is himself with a heart too big, and that Dream is right when he says that attachments cause harm. (And if he thinks that the pain is worth it, no one will know.)

Doomsday is when Tommy Innit "Theseus" Craft dies with a whisper. It's when a traumatized child-soldier takes his place, and how the universe shrieks for its loss.

Another round of explosions nearby snaps Tommy out of it.

Fuck. Fuck, *shit*, okay. Okay. He's trained for and has fought in situations like this. He's prepared. This isn't the DreamSMP anyway—this server is different. This server is different.

Tommy breathes in and out, watching as everyone but him scramble out the cafe. Eraserhead isn't here right now, he came in earlier today. Some people call out worriedly to him, their voices a jumble of muffled sounds to his ears, and yet Tommy only scowls and barks out, "I'm fucking fine! Stop worrying about me and get to safety!"

Inhale. One, two, three, four.

Glass shatters outside as the lingering civilians run, and Tommy is sure he can see smoke ahead, even with his blurry vision. A crash that shakes the ground makes sludge splatter on the windows.

Hold. One, two, three, four.

Tommy's eyes latch onto his duffel bag, then back outside. No one is here—they're focused on running and getting away.

Exhale. One, two, three, four.

Repeating the breathing exercise, Tommy snatches his bag and practically rips the zipper on it open. He sprints to the backroom and pulls his costume out, slipping into it like a glove. Despite the loose exterior the hoodie and pants seem to squeeze Tommy for all he's worth—or maybe, it's the seizing panic bubbling in his chest?

Prime, he has to fucking hurry up.

Clara sits at the bottom of the bag, and with calloused fingers, the vigilante picks it up. Tommy swallows, extending her to her fullest. This would be like his true debut, right? The media's first proper exposure to his vigilante persona. Everyone will watch him.

After this, he's on a fucking wanted list.

Tommy quickly hardens his grasp on Clara along with his resolve. He opens the other backroom entrance that leads down winding alleyways and bolts, uncaring of the reputation he'll get.

Because ultimately, when did that ever stop him?

When Tommy arrives, he almost thinks it's too late to save anything.

A vortex of mire constantly shifts in front of some heroes and a crowd, turning and twisting to reveal a pair of maroon eyes with yellow sclera and a jaw of smiling sharp teeth. Flames roar across the destroyed area, running rampant and filling the scent of smoke and burning buildings in the air. Broken lampposts, shattered glass, and the remains of walls litter the asphalt road, and Prime, Tommy doesn't know how to fucking feel about this.

This shitshow is much worse than Tommy thought. Not because of the surrounding area—no, he can handle fire quite well for a non-Blazeborn. But the villain has a fucking *hostage* trapped in slime-like tendrils of sludge and the villain's own teeth. It was the only inconsistency in the villain, just a head of blonde hair behind its mouth, and shit, the dickhead was controlling his hostage to create the carnage, right?

Tommy halts where he stands in an alleyway, because. Because the hostage looks up with wide, fear-stricken eyes and scrunched eyebrows, and.

And for a moment, Tommy can't fucking *breathe*.

Tubbo looks at the loaded crossbow pointed to his chest with dread, the tip of a candy-cane striped rocket hovering in front of him. He's stuck and there's nowhere to go in the little box he's trapped in, looking around frantically as Schlatt cackles with insanity. Pleading with the Blood God, the very piglin-hybrid who stands in front of him would be useless.

Tommy can feel his fear from here and yet. Wilbur told him to stay still, to not move because the time wasn't right. And of course, because he loves his brother despite everything, he listens. Techno won't pull the trigger anyway, he thought. Because his second brother figure holds any promise like a sacred oath, and that trait includes now.

(When it doesn't and Tubbo dies, Tommy screams with despair and guilt, guilt, guilt. But more than anything, he feels rage—at himself, at Wilbur, at Techno, and at everyone else who didn't move to stop it.

This time?

No, this time, Tommy won't listen to anybody. History may repeat again, but Tommy knows he can change the outcome.

This is his absolution, after all.)

Before Tommy can think, he's leaping forwards, pushing through the wreckage with Clara at his side, boosting himself with broken debris with his staff like a hook. It's a bit awkward with the heavy temperature, the debris, and the blunt ends of his beloved weapon, but he's handled worse. Fire licks his attire and singes the ends, the scent of *smokeTNTrockets* whirling in his face and rotting his lungs, the stench of something atrocious not far behind, though he doesn't care. All Tommy can think about is that struggling victim, his lifeless body, and a crushing guilt.

Clenching his teeth, he moves a little bit faster.

Digging up some dirt with a hand, Tommy flings it at the villain's eyes, most of the mud hitting its left. At the same time, a dull, yellow backpack strikes the other side, someone else following close behind. With a shriek, the villain twists, loosening their hold on the hostage. "Just a little longer..." The villain grins, raising a slimy hand. "*Don't get in my way!*"

Tommy doesn't know who's helping him, and he can hardly care right now. He just nods at a head of green hair before running around the villain.

Lunging upwards using more debris as a boost, Tommy makes another quick sweep for the villain's eyes using his staff. Sensing this, the villain changes their hand's trajectory and tries to swat Tommy away. Unfortunately for them, their accuracy is *shit* and only grazes Tommy's arm, which is why they're a low-class villain that only did petty shit 'til now. Regardless, Tommy shows that he's clearly superior since his swing actually hits, though Clara's edge seems to have hit only one of the eyes from the way the right is recovering faster.

Tommy bounds back and repeats. He spins and pivots, swivels and dodges, making fleeting attacks when he can. And yet his movements are feral, wild and honed with years of living alone and of fighting in wars. He utilizes his agility and how the villain is distracted doing two things at once as best as he can, making silent taunts that only cause the sludge monstrosity to get more unfocused and enraged.

Out the corner of his eye, Tommy sees Green Hair tug out one of the hostage's legs, popping it free and start pulling the other. The hostage's almost free from the greedy gasps of air Tommy can hear. That was probably his cue to help, innit?

So before the villain can prevent the opportunity, Tommy pivots back and away from the other two, holds his urge to shout and yell, and sticks his middle fingers up at the bastard.

The reaction he gets is priceless, and the villain swings in blind fucking rage. Too late for them, anyway—Tommy's already moved back to Green Hair, who's moments away from getting the victim out. As Green Hair pulls one arm, Tommy grabs the other and *heaves*.

The hostage rips out of his slimy cage with a sickening sound. Him and Green Hair tumble to the ground, both partially conscious and weakly standing, while Tommy only stumbles. He quickly grabs the two by their school-uniform collars and starts fucking dragging them away as fast as he can. He can't travel as swift as he'd like, the extra weight carrying him down, but Tommy forces them all to keep moving. Tommy can't even look back until they're safe; any show of fear or hesitance can and will be capitalized on.

"Sto—" Whatever the ex-hostage was going to choke out, it was replaced with pain-wrecking coughs and deep inhales. "I wa-as fine! I c-ould ha—*hand*—it—"

Tommy almost scoffs. Was this how Tubbo felt when he dealt with him?

"You..." The villain doesn't sound as distant as he should, but they're so, so close, just a little bit more, just— "You *fucking brats!*"

On instinct, Tommy spares a fleeting glance behind him and holy *fuck*, they're *not* going to make it. Because there's already a hand of sludge seconds away, and the villain moves as if he drank a fucking speed potion, and Tommy doesn't even realize he's flipped himself around after throwing the two far ahead until he does, raising Clara above his face and bracing himself for impact.

It doesn't come.

What *does* come is a harsh, degrading mixture of wind and smoke, wildly ruffling his hair and pushing Tommy back. It *roars* in his ears, almost as loud as the adrenaline in his veins or his heart in his ears. Tommy's shoes aren't made for this—fuck, he needs new ones—so he skids back a bit, sneakers scrapping against the asphalt road and debris. Small pebbles and dust graze his face, forcing him to squeeze his eyes shut further.

And moments later, it's gone.

Tommy opens his eyes to the number one hero in fucking Japan and doesn't know how he hold back his scream.

"I really am pathetic."

...What?

Tommy blinks. Not something he expected from the best of the best.

And he can't lie, All Might looked a little badass standing like that. Just a smidge. Tommy was obviously cooler, but this man's holding the sludge villain back with his forearm, strings of its weird-ass sludge sticking to his face and collar bone—how the fuck was he so jacked? Nevertheless, steam (steam? Not smoke? ...Huh) wafted from his form with a quiet hiss, though that didn't weaken the pearly-white smile that was plastered on his face.

The hero—why is he still smiling? Didn't he just do that for the media? Does he actually fucking smile every hour on the job? (Is he like Dream?)

Tommy takes a subtle step back, Green Hair mumbling an "All Might" with disgusting amounts of wonder and hope as the hero continues his speech. "Even though I admonished you, I wasn't putting what I said into practice!" Lifting his fist, All Might broke the sludge off and reeled it back, grabbing what he could with his other and shouting, "Pros are always risking their lives!"

"All Might!" The villain shrieks, raising another slimy hand. If Tommy startles, well, that's his business and his only.

Propelling his fist forwards, the number one hero rams his fist into the face of the villain. Tommy bets that if they had bones, all of them would be shattered in their head. Stepping back further and letting All Might grab both Green Hair and the ex-hostage, Tommy grips the hero's arm that holds them and prepares for his fucking *life*.

"Detroit Smash!"

And *oh*. Oh fucking *Prime*.

All Might fucking *desecrates* the villain. He turns the villain into a funnel, a gaping hole right in the middle as the villain's body flares out, leaving no trace behind. Tommy can feel himself being fucking—fucking *lifted off his feet*, so he strengthens his grip, digs Clara into the ground, bites his cheek to not scream, and prays its enough.

A vortex of wind spirals high into the sky, taking with it any remaining flames and smoke. The whirlwind seems infinite, everlasting, blasting everyone non-stop with wind. It feels like an explosion several degrees lower. Wasn't this just an overreaction to a small villain in terms of reputation? Or was this the power that the man used for every single one?

(And damn it, he still can't help but think of Dream, that powerful fucking bastard he fears so much.)

By the time it stops, Tommy's fingers feel numb and he's suffering from the adrenaline withdrawal. He slips his hand off All Might as fast as he can and steps back to check on the other two involved in the incident, almost dropping Clara in the process.

They're just knocked out. They're okay. Tommy breathes out, relieved, and turns back to the pro hero.

...All Might's huffing with a deep exhaustion. One that Wilbur would have during the Election and Pogtopia. That isn't normal, especially for the top hero.

Before he can ponder on it further, a drop of rain plops on his mask. He brushes it off, still staring at All Might, and—

Another?

Blinking in surprise, Tommy swipes that second droplet off right as another hits his gloved palm. There's another on his hood, one on his arm following close behind until a shower of rain starts to fall down. Tommy looks up to see the sky blocked by dark clouds. Wasn't the sky clear before this?

The pieces in Tommy's mind slowly connect themselves like a puzzle.

Did. Did All Might cause a fucking *storm*.

He spares a quick glance behind him to hear someone murmur about an updraft. Oh Prime, All Might made a fucking updraft with a *punch*. Shit, no wonder he's the top hero in this server.

Speaking of heroes, Tommy has to go like *right now*, because if he doesn't he'll be sent to prison! And if the prisons here were *anything* like Pandora's Vault, he wanted *no* part of it.

Taking advantage of everyone's stunned surprise, he darts towards an alleyway and maneuvers back through the twisting maze that is the hidden paths of the city. It's all natural to him, digging his nails into the dirty walls and flinging himself up with swift, pretty tricks, Clara in hand. Tommy climbs until he can run across the rooftops of the tallest buildings, throwing his vigilante costume off and shoving it all in his inventory. His energy is low, but that doesn't outweigh the rising fear in his gut, because he can still get caught in any moment. What kind of person moves across rooftops if they aren't a hero, after all?

Miraculously, he isn't. Finally landing on the sandy shores of Takoda, Tommy stands at the ends and relishes in the ocean air, body slumping in relief. He just stays there for what feels like thirty minutes before hastily changing out of his costume. Tommy rubs at the bandages on his arms as he retracts Clara back to a smaller size, putting his beloved staff in his pocket. He'll have to get the duffel bag back from the shop, but not now.

The moment Tommy flops on the soiled, springy mattress he's claimed as a bed, he passes out.

1. 5'4=162ish cm and 6'3=190ish cm according to google^{[[return to text](#)]}

edited mar. 8 2023 18:19/6:19PM

viridian.

Chapter Summary

HERE HE COMES

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"...What the *fuck*."

Green Hair gapes at Tommy as he says that, showing the same disbelief in their eyes. Tommy rubs his eye twice, having just woken up at six like usual, eyepatch still on his face, and slightly delirious from sleep. He'd heard something about limbs popping off as well as a body exploding and he sprung up. Tommy shakes his head and looks up, yet they were still there—he must've been real fucking exhausted, or maybe he needs to take his eyepatch off since his other eye's broken.

In front of Tommy, Green Hair's hauling a large double-sided fridge behind them with rope, *All Might* literally right on top of it and hugging his knees. They haven't been at it for long with how little of the shore is disturbed. Both look sheepish, though they did seem to try and make an explanation with the way their mouths keep opening and closing like a fish.

Prime, this feels like a fever dream. But this isn't a dream. And that's what makes everything all the more absurd. Tommy would be fucking cackling if this was anywhere else.

"What the fuck," Tommy repeats, as if the phrase will give him an explanation. "Why are you two here. *Especially* you, All Might."

"W-well, I. Sorry, I, um," Green Hair stutters. "We—more so me than anything—were t-training for U.A. This place s-seemed pretty private, which was great because of A-All Might, and it looked untouched, so w-we decided to start here. I-I mean, we can just move to a different place!" At this point, they're waving their hands around frantically. Tommy nods in hesitant understanding before quizzically looking at the number-fucking-one hero.

"...All Might's training you?" He asks, still staring at the hero.

Prime, his smile's still fucking unnerving, even with how ridiculous his position is, still perched atop of the fridge. "That I am, young man!" All Might affirms.

Tommy keeps staring at him.

All Might has power that he can use to destroy cities—to turn this world upside down. He's undefeated for the spot of number one. Tommy doesn't know what he's like besides how the media portrays him as: a hero. Really, he doesn't think *anyone's* seen him on break.

Tommy looked back to Green Hair (Prime, he should get their name), who was fidgeting where they stood. They were sort of like Tommy from what he knew, now that he's thinking about it. Definitely

not the same in terms of looks or personality, but. There were a few parallels, like how Green Hair had this unwavering flicker of determination in their eyes, as cliché and stupid as that was.

He glances back. All Might is still smiling.

(Hands running through his hair, a voice humming a tune as gloved hands stitch wounds together; a white, smiling mask staring down at him, covered in soot; honey-sweet words that stick to his skin and the lies mixed within; green, green, green; an empty beach party with only two, the puppet and its puppeteer; imagining molten lava surround him in the Nether, burning his skin yet never as much as the mental wounds and the phantom pain in his scars did; the aching exhaustion and the need for it to all end weighing in his bones as he builds a tower and hangs over the edge—)

Tommy inhales. One, two, three, four.

Exhales. One, two, three, four.

"What will you do." His words are laced with venom and an underlying threat.

It's All Might's turn to be confused. "...Aren't you supposed to ask why I'm—?"

"What will you do."

"Well," the hero hesitates. Tommy opens his inventory that holds Clara and prepares to fight, number one hero be damned. "I was planning to have Young Midoriya here follow a training regimen—my *Aim to Pass: American Dream Plan*. As he follows it, he'll also clean up all the trash on this shore. It should be enough for him to be prepared for U.A.'s exams in ten months."

Tommy relaxes just a bit, closes his inventory, and considers it for a moment.

These worlds were different. Dream is in the prison, so All Might can't be a reincarnated version or some shit. Plus, there's nothing about L'Manburg on the internet or anything that it led to. All Might is different.

With a sigh, Tommy grumbles, "You can stay here. Do training an' shit, I don't really care. I'm Tommy, I use he and him pronouns, and I'm not an American." Prime knows how many times people have called him *that* in Tari's.

At that, Green Hair brightens. "R-Really? Thank you so much!" He reels back a bit. "Oh, right! Even though A-All Might already said it, my n-name is Midoriya—Midoriya I-Izuku!"

Right. Surnames first, first names last. Manners and shit.

Nodding, Tommy points ahead of him, the right side of the shore. "Go over there on that side," he orders, almost turning around. "This side's mine."

"Thank you, Young Tommy," All Might exclaims, smile everlasting even as he hops off the fridge he was sitting on. Tommy can feel his face scrunch itself into a horrified, utterly offended expression, and it might be why the hero looks away a little too quickly. "Come on, Young Midoriya."

The aforementioned protege looks at Tommy with a weird look, something that makes him bristle defensively. Midoriya seems to push whatever he was thinking aside, turning around to follow All Might. "...R-Right!"

When they're gone, the rustling of metals and materials close behind as they move through the wreckage, Tommy falls on the ground. He covers his face with his hands and wonders why he agreed. Changes like this—*change* was never good.

Tommy just has to wait for how long this lasts until it's gone.

Ten months. Ten months of waking up and coming back from the cafe to two strangers in his home, moving shit around. Ten months of changing his schedule so that they don't find out he's a vigilante. Tommy (almost) regrets letting them stay.

He keeps watch of the two. He doesn't hide it, just sits on a desk and keeps track. Of All Might, specifically.

At the slightest twitch, Tommy has his inventory open. At a reaching hand, he almost snarls. At an encouraging shout, he flinches. Yet he sits there, never moving until they both leave.

On the first time he gave a smidge of advice to them, Midoriya asked why he stayed there. "I'm making sure he doesn't do—you know, any shit to you," he responds, and that was that.

Nine months left.

The first time All Might is forced to deflate, Tommy can't say he's surprised. The two of them—All Might and Midoriya—are, though.

"Y-You," Midoriya stutters, holding a metal box that makes him crouch. "You aren't gonna question it?"

"I thought something was a bit wriggly with that," Tommy says, stepping off his little perch for the first time in their vicinity, "Just didn't wanna ask. Privacy, sore spots, insecurities—that shit."

He steadily walks closer, a hand under his chin as he observes the thin figure that is All Might. "Makes sense, really, and I knew your fuckin'—*cover*, or whatever, was too perfect. A big man like you can't stay in that form for too long—takes too much energy, innit? Perfect drawback for your quirk, like a timed boost in a game or some shit."

Tommy looks at the man's true form in the eyes and states, "I won't tell." Who knows what would happen if the media knew about this. This server would probably crumble, and Tommy doesn't want a repeat of 2b2t because All Might dies.

"Anyways," Tommy motions towards an area with his shoulder. "There's a few heavier tires over there. Use those instead." With the way they relax and continue on, and how All Might becomes Yagi Toshinori, Tommy knows they're grateful.

Eight months left.

"Hey, Big T?"

Toshinori turns to Tommy while he coaches Midoriya, who's running with three tires to the truck at the entrance. The pounding of Midoriya's feet is practically white noise by now, though Tommy still startles a bit every once in a while. "Yes, Young Tommy?" The hero asks.

Tommy will ignore that fucking insult today. He brings Clara out of his inventory and fiddles with her retracted form, not missing the way Toshinori's eyes widen in surprise. "I know how to fight without a Quirk," Tommy says. "Midoriya shouldn't—*can't* become someone like you, or others who relies on their quirks to fight too much, not to be offensive and shit. What if he were to come across someone who could erase Quirks? All of this training would be useless—it gives him muscle, but not *experience*. If he were with me, though, his progress would become pretty poggers."

Toshinori's brightened considerably when Tommy looks up, not fazed by the call-out. But then he frowns out of nowhere, something sharp in his eyes for a second before it switches back to the hero's normal expression. Tommy straightens on instinct. "It's fine, it's fine," Toshinori hums, taking out his American Dream Plan and scribbling something down with a random pencil. "That's a perfect idea! Thank you, Young Tommy!"

"Not *young*," he grumbles, because this is the fourth fucking time this afternoon. He'd have yelled it if it didn't garner attention. "I'm a Big Man."

Toshinori doesn't hear because he's an old, old man.

Midoriya comes back soon after, Toshinori pulling him over. Tommy watches the hero's protégé gradually gleam with awe, determination and happiness, staring at Tommy with some weird, shitty reverence. He can't help but think of himself as Techno and laugh, a bittersweet pain.

The next day, they begin training in one of the larger areas Midoriya has cleaned, the sand covered with slightly grimy blue mats. Midoriya has a staff of his own: a thin metal pole All Might bent back into shape, the hero himself standing a few feet away. The green-haired teen had only whispered "pogchamp" as it was bent, which made Tommy spit out the coffee he'd brought in laughter. Prime, he's such a good influence.

"Alright," Tommy begins, clapping his hands together. Since he's holding Clara it's a bit awkward, but he manages. "First things first: familiarity. Before you can even begin to fight with it, you gotta know your weapon. Know its capabilities, what it can't do, what it can; as well as its strengths, weaknesses, weight capacity, et cetera. You also gotta have a good understanding of yourself, too; what you're able to do without a quirk, what you can now do with your weapon, and extend it bit by bit from there."

"So what you're going to do," Tommy pauses, sharing a feral, animalistic grin with the student, "is race against me."

Tommy spins and digs Clara's edge into a nook on a heap of junk, pulling himself up even as his mind screams at him to come back down to safety. He swings, using his hands to grab smoother edges and outlying planks as jump boosts. The dull edges of his nails easily dig into small grooves, allowing him to scale easier. He avoids the hanging ledges and weaker points with ease.

Breathless, Tommy latches onto the top, crawling over it before looking down. Tommy's always been good at climbing cobblestone even before SMP Earth, so climbing Takoda's mountains are a breeze. The height terrifies him, but he pushes it aside. "Fuck *you*, trauma!" He crows, triumphantly looking to the skies.

He cackles at the shocked looks on Midoriya and Toshinori's faces as he looks down. "What the fuck are you waiting for, Big M? C'mon, try it out! Or," Tommy smirks, his head on his hand propped up by his elbow, "are you not ready for it, *bitchboy*?"

That brings a determined look to Midoriya's face. He pushes his pole into the pile of trash before slowly climbing up, Tommy hyping him up little by little all the while. Midoriya flinches when something shifts or groans, but Tommy doesn't let him focus on that. He shouts over the sounds, tells him to keep climbing, and rejoices when he does. Hell, it even works a bit too well—Midoriya forgets about it to the point where he has a smile and is enjoying himself.

At the top, when Midoriya gets there with shaking legs, Tommy cheers, "Pog! You did it! Honestly I didn't think you would since you've never done this before, but good for you, Big M!"

Midoriya doesn't respond, still looking down. "Hey," Tommy consoles, hands shaking, "If you don't want to do this, that's okay. Sorry. We can find another way or something, like actual close-combat, alright?"

No response except for quicker breaths. Shit, shit, shit, look what he's done. "None of this quick shit. Sorry, sorry; I just thought that because you looked more agile and more accustomed to running than fighting like me, that climbing like this would be at least a good strength—I probably shouldn't have fucking suggested that in the first place, sorry—and I'm sorry for assuming that, I really am, *please don't leave me*—"

"Tommy," Midoriya breathes, "Tommy, that was great!"

"I know, I'm sor—what?"

"I-I mean," Midoriya stammers, "I'm sorry for, uh, worrying you like that! I really am! It's just, c-climbing like that felt really good! Like, I got this adrenaline rush, but a good one! And it was all so new and fast and I was j-just processing it for a bit!"

Tommy stills. "...Really? You aren't mad at me?"

Midoriya sputters, hands flailing wildly. "N-No, of course not!" He adamantly says. "Why would I be? I-I-I'd probably have to do this in U.A. like you said, and I'm thankful y-you can help me out now instead of me being forced to do it way later on! So—thank you!"

Time seems to pause. Tommy looks at Midoriya with scrutiny, searching for *anything*. Deception? Betrayal? Manipulation? Lies?

...There's nothing. Nothing he could tell on Midoriya's body language or face or in his eyes. And unless Midoriya is a good liar today, because Tommy *knows* he's horrible at lying at best, he was—being honest. More honest than any other member in the current (can he even call it current when it would've been altered by now? Tommy shivers when thinking about what could've changed) state of the Dream SMP besides Puffy at her therapy office.

And Prime, does that make Tommy's eyes water.

He forces them to dry and allows himself to sniffle once. An honest smile grows on his face. "You're welcome, Big M."

Six months left.

Midoriya gets better at climbing and using his terrain to his advantage as time passes. In between those, Tommy helps him haul some junk away, claiming that he needed to get more muscle too. Technically, it isn't wrong. Even with the vigilante work and his expanding patrol area, it really only

helps his legs since potential villains are now too frightened of him appearing, enough to lower crime rates in his area.

"H-How do you," Midoriya wheezes between his words, pausing every few moments to breathe. He has a fridge on his back, strapped to his currently-hunched body. "How do you... h-handle this—s-so... well?"

Tommy, with another fridge on his back, grins. He stands and feels bigger than ever, taking the time to wax about how superior he is. "I'm just the biggest man in the world, that's how! You'll never be on my level, bitchboy," he teases, flexing his arms, albeit limited.

Midoriya scrunches his eyes, a mischief in there that makes Tommy prepare for something. What he doesn't expect is him "stumbling," thus "accidentally" bumping into Tommy, sending him tumbling to the sandy ground. Tommy squeaks when the fridge forces him to turn, now unable to get up because he's strapped on top of the fridge face up. "*WHAT THE FUCK—*"

Midoriya chortles, a breathy, high-pitched thing. He bends over even more—how is that even possible—when Tommy flails, arms and legs flinging around wildly because he's tall but the fridge is wider and he can't *fucking* get down. "MIDORIYA! TOSHINORI! *HELP ME!*" Tommy shrieks, twisting and turning, rocking the fridge around like a shaky boat.

Cackling, Midoriya kneels on the ground, "You—oh my god you—you're like a *t-toddler!*"

"I'M NOT A TODDLER—"

"Aw, what's the baby trying t—" A giggle, "to say? I-Is this baby's first words?"

Tommy sputters. "LISTEN HERE, DICKHEAD, I'M NOT A BABY—"

Toshinori watches with a soft smile and lets them have a break.

Four months left.

Midoriya comes to Takoda with the world on his shoulders, sometimes.

And during these days, he covers his burns up with long-sleeved shirts and even longer pants; with white bandaging under the fabrics and large smiles; with scratches on his arms and a dull look in his eyes; with sweat and the drive to keep working until he dropped.

Tommy doesn't let him train on those days. He tells Toshinori that Midoriya needs a break every once in a while, and Toshinori accepts it. Tommy was sure he would after they found out Midoriya was overworking himself when they weren't cleaning the beach.

After Toshinori leaves because he *trusts Tommy* to train his protege (and isn't that a dangerous thing?), he ushers Midoriya over to a specific part of the dump. There, he brings out gauze, clean bandages, water bottles, a fresh cloth, and some burn salve while sifting through other things. Midoriya had looked surprised at the arsenal of medical supplies, but he hadn't hesitated to sit down on a leaning chair and hold out his arms when Tommy told him to do so.

It's silent as Tommy unwraps the other's burn scars as carefully as he can, tossing them aside. Then, with delicacy so unlike him, Tommy picks up a cool water bottle and the cloth, submerging the latter in the water. After that, he starts softly pushing it over the healing wounds, even if they're old,

wrinkled, small, or barely there. Midoriya doesn't react, tracing the starburst scars with his eyes and an emotion Tommy can't read.

It's like that for thirteen minutes or so, a quiet atmosphere that Tommy despises yet accepts. The only things that disturb it are their breathing and the treatment. He decides to break it.

"Bad day?" Tommy asks in a near whisper. He elevates the burns as he starts bringing some burn cream with aloe vera in it out, lightly smearing the paste on the burned area. Second degree burns, even if scarred, were a bitch.

Midoriya looks up. "Yeah," he murmurs, just as soft.

Tommy hums. Cold anger permeates his bones like a blizzard, just waiting to lash out. "Will you tell me who did this?"

"...no." That's fine. He already has a suspect. "How do you know how to treat burns?"

"I'm just that big of a man!" Tommy jokes, if only to lighten the mood a little. He swallows, pausing his ministrations for just a moment. "...but I do have my own, so."

And that's that.

He starts wrapping his arms up, leaving space so that the burns aren't agitated further by the pressure. "Those should be waterproof," Tommy says, grabbing another bottle as well as some petroleum jelly to give to the other. He stands and starts resorting the burn salves, bandages and everything else he'd brought out. "If they come loose, come to me—I'll always be here. Easier than going to your mom 'n' shit. 'Cause of the bandages, you'll be doing light exercises. Don't look at me like that, dickhead—you'll overwork your body and fucking collapse or feel like you're—like you're dying."

Midoriya stands up around the time Tommy does, waiting at the entrance of his mini-clinic. Tommy looks back when he's finished, raising an eyebrow at him. "What're you waiting for?" He questions.

"Can I hug you?"

And *wow*, okay, Tommy wasn't expecting that. Midoriya didn't mean to blurt that out either, from the way he quickly turns red, stammering out, "W-W-Wait, I didn't mean to say that! Uh, p-please pretend I didn't say that at all! Yep, yeah, I-I-I'm just gonna leave now! Thank you!" Ending with nervous chuckles, Midoriya starts to dart out the makeshift clinic.^[1]

"*A hug is fine!*" Tommy quickly looks down when the other teen whips his head towards him. He tugs the collar of his t-shirt. "A hug is fine," he repeats. "You don't have to because I'm a Big Man who rarely needs hugs, but it's okay if it's for you."

Without warning, Tommy finds himself on the ground with his arms filled with one Midoriya Izuku, who's squeezing his torso like no tomorrow. He flinches hard, Midoriya no doubt feeling it because he relaxes his grip. Then, Tommy hears a snuffle that isn't from him.

"Thank you," Midoriya mumbles, "for caring."

Oh, Prime. *Crying*. How the hell does he deal with this?

Reluctantly, Tommy encompasses him with his arms in return, the touch like a pleasant, tingling fire under his skin. He melts, awkwardly patting Midoriya's back. "No problem, Midoriya."

"...You can call me Izuku."

"Alright then, Izuku."

After a moment, Tommy lets go, Midori—*Izuku* moving away from his embrace. There's still a few tears streaming down his face and he can hear a tiny snuffle, but Izuku's smiling, so it's fine. "Sorry," he says, "and thank you. I... I needed that."

Tommy grins; it's genuine.

Prime, he's really attached now, huh? He ponders this as they both leave, planning to just walk on the shore for now.

Well, might as well go all in since he's already too deep.

Three months left.

"Hey, Tommy?" Izuku shuffles a few things as he calls out to his best-friend.

Tommy pops up seconds after, several feet above him on a pile of random shit. "Yeah?"

Izuku holds a dark hoodie, mask, and gear. It's all lined with red and stitched together in several places, off-color patches and string intermingling to fix it. Tommy's mind stutters, because how the *fuck* was that there? Wasn't it on the other side of the beach?

Oh. They *were* cleaning the other side of the beach.

Tommy pales while Izuku looks at him, asking, "Is this what you've been hiding?"

Silence falls. It's broken only by the chirping of birds and the pounding of the vigilante's heart, an erratic thud-thud, thud-thud, thud-thud. Everything is too loud. Tommy can feel the grime on his skin and every piece of his clothes, and every time he's been nicked or hit on his vigilante patrols burns with vengeance.

Instead of answering, Tommy questions, "Are you going to call the police on me?"

Izuku smiles. He lowers the costume with a small disbelieving laugh. "No," he answers, "I won't. Why would I? Dusk hasn't done anything bad. H-Hasn't done anything major, either, besides the Sludge Villain Incident—thank you for, y'know, helping me out, by the way."

"This is also my way of saying thank you for saving me, though I probably wouldn't report you even if we were still strangers." Tommy gapes. Izuku looks away as he continues. "Thank you for the bandages, the burn salve, the ointments, the training. Your trust, our friendship—thank you for it all."

"I—" He can't think of anything to say, all the words he could jumbling themselves up in his head. All he can do is just gawk there, stupidly, and stare.

"You don't have to answer," Izuku hums, as if reading his mind. "Your actions are enough."

"..." Finally, Tommy manages a strangled, "It's way too fucking early for you to be all sentimental an' shit."

Izuku chuckles sheepishly, his hand that holds the vigilante costume lowering subconsciously. "S-Sorry."

"Don't fuckin' say sorry that often anymore." Tommy holds a hand out, gesturing towards the clothes. "Give that to me," he says, "I'll put it in my inventory."

"Inventory?" Ah, shit. "Is that your quirk?"

"Sort of," he murmurs, shoving the costume in his hotbar after the panel appears.

"...Why didn't you put the costume in that?"

Tommy huffs, gently snatching the clothes away. "The more things in my inventory," he explains, "the more... weight? Heaviness? Is on my shoulders. Here," Tommy pats a nearby sofa, dotted with holes and uncovered springs. He taps an empty square in his inventory and then the sofa, watching its icon pop up. Seconds later, Tommy feels his knees buckle at a suppressive weight on his entire being. He glances to the side—the sofa's gone. "Ah fuck," he groans, "The drawback's heavier than I thought."

Izuku runs and hovers near him, unsure of what to do. His panic is hilarious, and he'd laugh if his focus wasn't on his inventory. "*Tommy*, take the sofa out!"

"I'm *fine*, Big I," he consoles, selecting the sofa in his inventory. Then he grimaces. "*Eugh*, wait, that nickname's shit. I'll come up with another one later or something. Anyway, 's nothing Big Man Tommy Innit can't handle." A sharp inhale escapes him as the sofa lands on the sand once more with a soft but heavy *thump*, the weight leaving soon after.

With a relieved sigh, Izuku soon starts to bounce in place. He'd probably have his notebook out or something if he could, the nerd. "So how does your inventory work?" He excitedly asks.

As Tommy's bombarded with questions and untested theories, he thinks that he's thankful for this change.

Two months left.

Two teenagers sit on a pile of junk, legs swinging over the ledge. One huffs, clearly exhausted with sweat dripping down his face and a pole in his hand. He relaxes when a breeze comes by, ruffling his green hair and cooling his skin. The other is staring at the moon and its stars, watching them twinkle in the dark night. They sit in comfortable silence, interrupted by crickets and the sea shore.

"Tommy?" It's a quiet sentence, barely heard even in this bright night.

"Yeah?"

"If you," a gulp, "if you had a friend. Since childhood, all the way until now. And they start hurting you because you're different, but now they aren't and go radio silent... What would you do?"

The bristling anger in him makes him want to explode. Tommy resorts to spinning Clara around and imagining he killed *Dream*. "I'd fight, or at least defend myself if they ever approached me again. Even if I were boxed in a corner, physical or metaphorical, I'd defend myself. Run if I can.

"If they never approached me again? I'd let them, even push myself farther away. Or, if they're in an environment wherein they can't hurt me—" Lies, that's all *lies*, because he went to the prison for that *and look how that went?* Tommy clenches his jaw. "If they're in a position where they can't hurt me or

be able to trap me wherever they're enclosed, I'd—I'd go and find closure. Reasons why they did the shit they did."

Izuku hums, contemplative. He says, "You know someone like that, too."

Tommy stays silent. The moon shines brighter than ever tonight.

A few moments later, Izuku quietly says, "The world is pretty cruel. Due to Quirks and the pr-present social hierarchy, my—*friend* despises me. Everyone does, when they find out I'm Q-Quirkless." He flinches. "...I-I haven't told you that. Sorry."

Tommy thinks of all he's done as a human and snorts, waving his hand. "That's fine, big man. Just means that you gotta work a little harder. Plus, without Quirkless people as the base, people with quirks wouldn't exist."

Smiling softly, Izuku looks down with unshed tears. "Thank you, but... people usually don't think that," he continues. "They think I'm useless. And at some points, I a-am. Yet I have the highest grades in the school besides my childhood f-friend, so that makes me capable of something. And. You remember the Sludge Villain Incident?"

"How could I not?" Tommy picks at his bandages.

"A-After that, like I said, my friend's been r-radio silent." Tommy abruptly grips his forearm. Prime, he was going to fucking *kill* that blond *bastard*—

No. No, not now, not ever. Izuku still sees that bastard as a friend—of course he does, because Izuku has a bleeding fucking heart—and he'd mourn if Tommy went and offed him. Tommy isn't the next Wilbur, but he doesn't want to be *Dream* instead. So he lets the tension in his body go, forcing his hand back to lightly tugging the white fabric.

"The thing is," Izuku says, "I—I should be happy. *Ecstatic*, even! I should b-be rejoicing, c-celebrating by doing *something*. B-But."

Tommy turns to look at Izuku. The other teen's curled up, painfully hunched in himself. Now that he looks further, Izuku's is trembling. His next words are so shaky and wobbling that Tommy almost can't understand them, and *fuck*, does that hurt. "T-Tommy, Tommy I'm so *scared*. I'm t-terrified of what will happen when he sees me at U.A., terrified at what he'll d-do to me—terrified of my *future*, if my men-mental state will once again become s-so bad that I'll think I won't don't deserve to *have* one.

"A-All Might didn't help m-much, either, as much as I h-hate to admit. He. Before t-this, before the Sludge Villain Incident, he hurt m-me. Badly. And I—of course I forgave him, b-but I don't t-trust his as much as I want t-to. I don't—I—w—who says he won't l-lose faith in me and leave, too?

"I've c-considered therapy for m-my childhood t-trauma and th-these thoughts. I have, I *have*, and yet. I'm also terrified of that, too—of people saying t-that I'm just being a wuss, that everyone else w-was just playfully roughhousing, that e-everything I've been through was all a *joke*, just like a-all the other adults. The b-burns were a joke, the bruises we-were a joke, and that I was j-just being stupid because I'm *Quirkless*! Just because t-therapists help people doesn't mean that they're not *dis-discriminatory*, that they don't *believe the same thing EVERYONE ELSE DOES!*"

Sobs rip out from Izuku's throat. Tommy moves from the ledge, hastily wrenching Izuku's hands away from where they were digging into his skin. He hesitates before hugging Izuku, feeling dull nails jab

his back and claw like no tomorrow.

Tommy lets Izuku cry on his shoulder, rubbing circles onto his heaving back. He can't say that things will be okay, because that's the cost of pursuing a heroic career, but...

"You'll get through it," he chooses, murmuring his reassurances. "You'll fucking get through it, and you'll become stronger. You'll come out battered and bruised and all rigid edges, but you will heal. And when that happens, it means that you're stronger. When you heal, you'll be the bigger man—the bigger hero. You'll learn how to let go of it all, while your friend doesn't."

Even through his sobs and screams, Tommy can feel his friend shakily nod on his shoulder.

It takes several minutes for Izuku to calm down, his heaving cries turning into muted sniffles. Despite the looser grip and the silence that comes after, they don't move. Tommy still rubs circles on the other's back as he shivers.

"...S-Sorry."

"It's fine. Stop apologizing. I'll be here for you whenever, alright?"

"Alright. Thank y-you."

"No problem."

Tommy shifts to a more comfortable position. "What's your favorite color?"

"...Green."

"Oh, of course it is!" The mocking remark is quieter than usual. "Big Man, you've got it all wrong—*red* is obviously fucking superior. You just can't see its glory."

Izuku snorts. "*You're* just mad that green is the best c-c—color."

"Oh, fuck *off*—meh meh meh, *I'm Midoriya Izuku and I like green because my hair's all weird and my eyes are green and all my shit's green!*" You're just in *denial!*"

"I-I don't sound like that!" A watery laugh. "I'm not in denial, either!"

"Shifting the blame is obviously denial; but don't worry—I'll be here as you go through the five stages of grief."

"*Tommy!*"

For a moment, as the moon rises overhead, all is good.

One month left.

Takoda's become the cleanest its ever been. Izuku's cleaned the area Toshihori assigned him, but they—more so Izuku because this was the last stretch before the exam—were currently getting rid of some extra things even though it was around midnight. Tommy sits atop of a small closet, watching his friend drag over a few dusty cabinets and a broken TV to the truck. He sighs, looking around—Prime, he'd miss scaling the piles of junk and finding gems.

"Tommy?" The aforementioned teen looks up, seeing Izuku standing near him. He hums questioningly at Izuku. "Have I told you w-why I was with All Might?"

Tommy raises a brow, "No? I didn't wanna ask. Privacy 'n' shit."

"Oh," Izuku twiddles his fingers, shifting nervously. He looks overhead to the rails of Takoda and relaxes a bit when no one's behind them. "Well, I wanted to tell you. You've done so much for m-me and All Might, after all. He agrees that we should tell you—talked to him about it yesterday, on the phone."

"Fucking spit it out already, then. You're making this sound like an *affair*."

Izuku laughs, startled, before sitting next to Tommy, the tension sliding off his shoulders. Doesn't stop him from shoving Tommy lightly, though. "It's not and you *know* it!" He grins.

"Oh, I don't know," Tommy hums, setting a hand on his chin theatrically. "With the amount of shit you know about All Might, I'm thinking you might be—"

"*Yuuuuuuuuuu*," Izuku says, slamming his hands over Tommy's mouth, "shut up!" When Tommy licks his palms with a smirk, Izuku recoils violently, wiping his hands over his plans equally as fiercely.

It's all fine. It got Izuku to smile, even when it dims as he begins with, "O-Okay, back to my, uh—to what I wanted to say. I'm... not too sure where to begin? Um, okay, so. You know how All Might's Quirk is unknown and constantly questioned?"

When Tommy nods, Izuku continues, his voice considerably lowered. "So, uh, I know about what it really is. It's called One for A-All, a Quirk that can be passed down and also stockpiles the strength of its previous wielders, who've also—c-cultivated it? Yeah. This—you know I started t-training months ago, and it's supposed to help me be a proper 'vessel,' so to speak. If I didn't do this, I'd die when obtaining the power."

"S-Sorry I can't explain it with more details," he apologizes, dipping his head lightly. "He, uh. Hasn't told me much besides that. But that's the g-gist of it."

Tommy blinks. Bursting out into a laugh, he cackles wildly, ignoring Izuku's surprised look. "W-Wait," he wheezes, "you'll look l-like *that* old man when you get his Quirk?! *Really?!?*"

"Hey! All Might isn't *old*," Izuku pouts. "And I probably won't *look* like him, b-but I'll have his powers."

Wiping a tear from his eye and adjusting his eyepatch, Tommy lets out a few more giggles. "Sorry, Big Man," he says completely unapologetically, "but you looking like All Might is *so* fucking funny. Anyways, in all honesty, you getting the Quirk is pretty pogchamp. You deserve it."

Izuku swallows, looking at his fist. "B-But, I..."

"Hey, shut the fuck up." Tommy says, lightly smacking Izuku's head. "None of that."

Izuku frowns. "Okay, fine."

Comfortable silence fills the air. Tommy smiles at Izuku's accomplishment, breathing the fresh, salty air. He looks at it, at the seas, and at everything Izuku has done for him in turn, and blurts out, "Have I ever told you about L'Manburg?"

Prime, Tommy shouldn't have said that because now Izuku's looking at him. "No," Izuku answers, carefully slow, "no, you haven't. Y-You don't have to."

...Oh, fuck it—he's already gone too far in, anyways. Additionally, Izuku—and by extension, Toshinori—had given him very valuable information, and he can't just accept that.

"It's my home," Tommy says. "My family, my dedication—my nation. It. Doesn't exist here, but it's real. Somewhere. Had a flag, its citizens, soldiers; even its own anthem."

Tommy pauses. He removes part of the bandages off his arms methodically, staring at the marred skin instead of glancing at the sharp inhale of surprise next to him. Tracing the edges with his finger, he wonders when the DreamSMP turned into a fight for power all for two measly discs. "I gave my everything for it."

Wrapping the scars up again, Tommy looks to the night skies and envisions an obsidian grid. He breathes, his lungs clean from ashes and smoke and flames. Wherever Tubbo is, or where Ranboo is, Tommy hopes they're happy.

The pang of homesickness in his heart goes ignored (why should he acknowledge it when it's barely considered his home anymore?)

"I heard there was a special place," he begins. After years of not being used to sing, especially for English, his voice cracks in a few places. Some notes are flat, some are sharp, and yet it still creates the shell of a symphony in his ears.

"Where men could go and emancipate." If he closes his eyes, Tommy can imagine he's around a campfire with a newly-built L'Manburg and his friends who all despise him.

"The brutality, and the tyranny, of their rulers." The beginnings of L'Manburg from a single drug potion van; the start of a nation as Tommy sewed costumes with skillful hands; Wilbur, his not-by-blood brother, someone he'd die for, writing a formal declaration of independence; the war that followed not long after.

"Well this place is real, you needn't fret." Eret leading them all down into an obsidian box; the shifting of pistons and the feeling of dying, of something in his soul being ripped away and sealed, of never feeling *full* again; the questions and demands that were never answered, and the stinging pain of betrayal, and the crashing reality that he can't trust *anyone*—*"With Wilbur, Tommy, Tubbo, Fuck Eret."*

"A very big and not blown up L'Manburg." (Tommy slips off the cabinet, toes curling into the sand as he raises an arm and salutes for something long gone—for a lost cause, a broken symphony, always destined to become a cacophony.)

"My L'Manburg, my L'Manburg, my L'Manburg, my L'Manburg." Helping Niki sew their flag; sitting on the bench with Tubbo and his discs; fooling around with Wilbur as they brewed potions; getting along with Fundy and Eret—

Tommy can't. He can't sing any more. Any more lyrics, any more *memories*, and he'd crack.

Shakily, he sits himself atop of the furniture once more, wiping away the tears that had dripped off his cheek. He breathes. Inhale, one, two, three, four. Exhale, one, two, three, four.

"...Sorry," he murmurs, looking at Izuku. And, well, Izuku's crying himself. Unshed tears brim on his large, viridian eyes, his lips trembling like everything Tommy remembers with pain hurts him, too.

Before Tommy knows it, he's hugged once again in the past few weeks. Tommy startles—Prime, he'll *never* get used to this again—before he slowly encases his arms around his friend.

"Tommy," Izuku murmurs, "Tommy, I'm so *sorry*."

Tommy melts into the embrace. "What for? You can't change the past."

"I wish I could." Izuku leans back and at a slow pace, grips Tommy's shoulders. "You don't deserve that. People may think you're loud, annoying, boisterous, or too much—but you've befriended me. You let me train. You *h-helped* me train. You don't deserve," he waves a hand around, "any of your pain."

"But—"

"In your words," Izuku interrupts, "s-shut up. None of that."

Tommy chuckles. "Alright," he says, "You got me there."

A comfortable silence falls.

"...Wanna help me out with some of the junk? Maybe y-you could visit for the first time tomorrow, too, or some time at all—Mom wants to see you."

"Give me some more Coca-Cola tomorrow and we got a deal."

A few hours left.

"Hey, Izuku?"

Izuku, shirtless due to how the breeze was pleasantly cold this morning, hauls one of the last pieces of junk left over his shoulder and moves over to the truck. Tommy can just barely see his head of hair from where he stands, below the gigantic fucking wall that looms above the shore. "Yeah?" Izuku's voice is a bit distant.

"Today's the entrance exam, right?"

"Mhm! It's what we've—well, what *I've* been prepping for!"

Tommy pulls Clara out and fiddles with her edges. "When you get in U.A., can you visit?"

Silence falls. Tommy hunches in himself, an apology on the tip of his tongue. Was that too much? Was he being selfish again?

"Who said I wouldn't visit, Tommy?"

What? Tommy blinks. "You'd be busy with training to be a hero an' all of that, along with real classes. You wouldn't have the time." Tubbo didn't either, and Tommy can understand and forgive that—this was just the same situation.

"No, no," Izuku clarifies, "I planned to visit a-at least once a week. I won't leave you."

Tommy reluctantly smiles. "...Alright. I... I trust you."

Izuku brightens. "After I put this away," he gestures towards his occupied shoulder, where another microwave sits, "we're basically done, besides that small pile there. What do you wanna do? All Might's visiting in a couple of minutes, so."

Tommy shrugs. "Shout an' shit, I guess? Get all of your worries an' all out before the whole thing."

Grinning, Izuku sprints to the vehicle and sets the junk on its truck bed floor. He leaps over the mental railing, tumbling onto the mats they used with glee. Tommy sharply inhales, rushing over, only to relax when Izuku beams at him triumphantly. He still moves over and whacks Izuku on the shoulder, the victim dramatically flopping back with a pained, feigned groan. "If I knew that you wanted to scream with me that badly, I wouldn't have said shit. Prime, dude, give a guy a warning, alright? Also, your landing's still shit."

Izuku smiles like the little shit he is. "You would've caught me anyway! And the landing doesn't matter 'cause of the mats."

"Bitch? I was like *two miles* from the mats? Plus, these things can barely even count as mats anymore! They're all ripped an' shit from how much I've beaten you!"

Tommy holds a loose one up, shaking it.

"Eh," Izuku easily waves off, standing up. He starts moving towards one of the last trash piles. "The sand's soft, anyway." Tommy huffs and drops the mat, following along.

As they climb their small cliff, Tommy asks, "Why the hell do you wanna scream so badly?"

"I mean," Izuku begins, pulling himself up a bit with a struggle. Tommy snorts at his slight problem, easily scampering up what Izuku struggled with. The freckled teen pouts. "I *mean*, it means we've done it, that *I've* done this. That—That this beach is the one *we* cleared, and that I've become a better person both physically and mentally, y'know? That I'm *ready* for whatever's thrown onto me."

"I get it," Tommy replies, "you've became the biggest man I know. Besides myself, of course, but the Wife Haver Tommy Innit can't be defeated ever."

"Yep, mhm, totally."

"Oh, shut the fuck up. You're the one who *lost to me thirty-something times*, after all."

"Hey! That's uncalled for! And you have way more experience than me in fighting!"

"Nope! 'S rightfully fuckin' deserved for mocking one of my many grand titles."

Izuku huffs, managing to reach the top moments after Tommy did. He looks out to the sea before lifting his hand, three fingers up. "One."

"Two." Tommy follows his gaze, a manic grin on his face.

"Three!" They inhale, and *screech*.

Izuku looks up to the clouds and the skies and everything in between, thanking them for this blessing. Tommy looks down at the ground, the earth, its soil, its *life*, and is grateful he gets another chance.

Toshinori stands with a blue coat, light-blue scarf tied around his neck, his face sharp and sunken from age, wounds, and time. Regardless, he finds these two teenagers like this, both parallels yet

opposites, living yin and yangs counterbalancing themselves as they dance in a never-ending cycle, and is breathless.

This is the new generation. These are the people that he entrusts the future with, that everybody will believe in to keep the world at peace. These are the new heroes.

If this is truly what they are, Toshinori thinks, growing into his other form to congratulate them, then he has no qualms.

Chapter End Notes

1. ONCE AGAIN THIS IS ALLLLLL PLATONIC [\[return to text\]](#)

also sorry for that awkward ending ahahahah, i didn't know how to end this,,,,,,,,,

(edited 9/13/22 at 6:08 for a minor plothole: bakugo hadn't bothered izuku during the entire training montage in canon, but the 4-month mark implies that someone's still giving him burns. it's been modified so that it's just a Bad Day for izu,, thank you to *Ghost529* for pointing this out! :D)

edited again mar 9 2023

detrimental idolization.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Eat this."

Tommy one-hundred percent, with no doubt in his mind, regrets letting Toshinori and Izuku stay. Clearly, Izuku agrees in some form since he currently looks like he fucking saw hell and ran back. Tommy would've laughed if he wasn't feeling something like that too.

"All Might," Tommy begins, tone deadly serious and overflowing with judgement. "Big T, Toshinori, old man, *the number one fucking hero* in Japan and probably everywhere else you've been." He inhales. "*What the absolute fuck.*"

"It doesn't really matter what the medium is, so long as Young Midoriya takes my DNA," All Might clarifies, scratching his weird gravity-defying hair as he laughs. His hand, holding a strand of what Tommy once thought of was gelled hair (it actually defies the laws of gravity because its not gelled up, the strands are just *built like that*, what the *fuck*—) looks so fucking minuscule to the shit that Tommy expected.

He expected lights or some shit. Flashiness, spazz; *anything*, even if it made Tommy flinch, compared to how melodramatic *this* was. Because for a Quirk seemingly as powerful as One for All, or what Izuku said it was? Prime, this makes it so criminally *easy* for someone to get it.

He says as such, because he knows Toshinori's a moron but he has to know this in some capacity. Right? "Old man," Tommy closes his eyes, exasperated. "Do you know how many people could've just had OFA with your hair like that." The statement is rhetorical; he barrels on. "Sure, like a majority of most aren't suited, but you go out and destroy crime literally *all across Japan*, for fucks sake. There's more than ten billion people in the world—"

And wasn't that a surprise. Ten billion. Ten *billion*. Tommy's positive that Hypixel's never had even 100 million people on it simultaneously. This server has to be expansive and strong for there to be ten-fucking-billion people on it.^[1]

(When Tommy first found out that there were *that* many people on this one server, he made an oath to never look at its history unless it was necessary for whatever the fuck he wanted to do. Because—because Tommy can't wrap his head around a billion people on one server, let alone ten. 2b2t didn't even have that many people before it went to shit, and Hypixel only remains as structured as it is since it has good Admins. The DreamSMP has less than ten thousand people, and look what it's become.^[1]

Yes, Tommy fears it. Because if the Quirkless are the *minority*, if nearly *everyone* has Quirks, then—then Tommy doesn't even want to imagine what this server's been through, for it to maintain such a delicate balance between chaos and order.)

"—at least thirty fucking *percent* of them have done harder training than Izuku, and a few of those people may have your DNA somewhere because you've probably saved them at some point in time—they might have OFA and *you wont know*. The day your hair starts fuckin' falling out and you've gone *bald* is All Might's official retirement arc."

And to that, Toshinori seems to... not care. He laughs joyously, actually, completely avoiding the question which, *wow*, what the *fuck*, this is a *genuine concern*. "Now then, Young Midoriya," he says, ignoring Tommy, though he does seem a bit panicked, "there's no time to waste! You'll be late for the exam!"

And, oh. Tommy's fingers twitch. Oh, that's a thing. The reason why any of this happened. This is when, despite everything, Izuku leaves.

Izuku snaps out of his confusion out of his peripheral vision, looking at Toshinori with determination. "R-Right!" He says easily. Tommy doesn't understand it a lot of the time, how Izuku can give so much unfaltering respect and reverence to those who hurt him.

Tommy looks away as Izuku takes the strand of hair from Toshinori, cringing when he can hear him swallow and—and gag. What the fuck, what the *fuck*, he's never fucking looking at either of them the same ever again.

"All right!" Toshinori rejoices as if it's an *accomplishment*, which honestly? It really is—Tommy wouldn't do that even if it was for Wi—past Wilbur. Prime, he's *so* glad he isn't Izuku. "You swallowed the hair, right?"

"I-I did. Don't feel any different, though..."

Toshinori laughs. Even now, he keeps up that act. It makes Tommy's skin crawl, and he isn't Dream, stop fucking thinking about that bastard. "Of course not! What do you think the stomach does? You'll feel something in about two to three hours."

"Wait," Tommy frowns, because that can't be right. "So he'll receive the thing in like, two or three fuckin' hours? When the exam starts in, I don't fucking know, four or five or six? His body will only have the Quirk for about three hours max."

Solemnly, the hero nods. "Unfortunately, that's all that he can take in the amount of time we were given." Toshinori purses his lips, turning towards Izuku again. "You've become a proper vessel, but it was one that was made in a hurry. You didn't even get to take it for a test-drive... Prepare yourself for the physical repercussions it'll have on your body."

Izuku hums, looking down in contemplative silence.

Toshinori shifts, saying, "I don't have time to explain in detail, so I'll just tell you this. When you use my quirk, One for All, squeeze your buttocks and yell this inside your heart—"

All Might reels his fist back towards the shore of Takoda.

"*SMASH!*"

Propelling forward, his fist brings a whirlwind with it, making a groove where clean sand once was. It shoves through the surface, kicking sand up, and soon water joins the mix. The oceans part for the blast of power, raging waves turning to ripples on its sides. For a good thirty seconds, it keeps going until it disperses with a whisper.

Silence fills the air as the trio face the damage. Then, Tommy snorts, but it's a bit bland even to his ears. "Could've gone with something else, old man. I don't do speeches—" he shoves away any thoughts of the DreamSMP before he continues. "I don't do speeches, but *buttocks*? Out of everything, you fucking choose *buttocks*?"

"You use phrases like that too," Izuku points out. "Like calling me an 'awe-inducing, partially lovable cockroach that burrows into your heart and never gets out.'"

"I fucking know that, but I'm *me*—Ass Might is *old*, he should know more old people words. Anyway, c'mon, Big Man—"

"Buttocks does sound old, though?"

"Anyway, *c'mon*, Big Man," he repeats as casually as he can, watching as Izuku shrugs his bag on. "All Might's old, but he's also right this time. Get going."

Izuku notices Tommy's inner turmoil anyway, the observant fucker. Or maybe Tommy's just bad at acting. Yeah. Wilbur's always said that about him, back before the DreamSMP.

"Tommy?" Izuku asks, concern etched into his face. "Is there s-something wrong?"

Tommy looks away. As much as he doesn't want to admit, it'd be reasonable for Izuku to just leave him now. He's finished training, there's no use to stay here. Who'd want to stay with someone like Tommy? No one did, or ever does. He doesn't even want to stay with himself, and that's something.

Izuku's eyes widen like he already knows why Tommy's acting—Prime, he's too fucking observant. "Hey," he whispers, walking close enough to Tommy so that he can hug him. "'M not gonna abandon you or betray you o-or any of it. Gonna come back as soon as I can, okay?"

Reluctantly, Tommy hugs back, barely restraining himself from melting in the gentle hold despite the height difference. "You swear?"

"Yeah."

Tommy shakily exhales. It'll have to be enough.

Pulling away, he grins, patting Izuku's shoulder. He then takes out three golden apple slices from his inventory, taking Izuku's hands and setting them in his palms. "Eat those when you're severely hurt," he says.

Izuku scrunches his face, thankfully not questioning it (and he'll never admit it, but that show of trust absolutely warms Tommy up.) "'When?' Not '*if*'?"

"Knowing you, you'd probably do something to get yourself hurt regardless if you don't use OFA or do." Tommy chortles at the other's expression.

"You can't say anything, Tommy!"

Tommy grins, but unfortunately has to fall back into the partially solemn mood. "Kick everyone's ass, alright?" He orders.

Izuku snorts. "Yeah, I'll tr-try, Tommy." He says. "You'll kick mine if I don't." He moves over to where the rest of his stuff is and picks it up, including his shoes. Then, when Izuku taps Toshinori's shoulder, the man smiles and hoists the teen up like he's nothing. Tommy's unfazed by the sight, having seen it hundreds of times before.

"I'll see you in a bit, Tommy!" Izuku calls, gripping one of All Might's gravity-defying hair streaks, whatever those were.

Tommy grins. "Don't die, dickhead!"

"I won't!"

They launch off, leaving Tommy to play the waiting game by himself.

Tommy tugs on his hair, glancing to the entrance of Takoda every so often. It's around eleven in the morning, another off-day from Tari due to a lame excuse he made up on the spot (Prime, Tommy doesn't deserve his job there.) According to Izuku, the exams usually take a few hours due to both a written and practical test, and he wasn't going to use OFA much. From the measly amount of research he did on U.A. at the beginning, hero-course examinees were usually against giant fucking robots or something, for the most part. Hence why he gave Izuku a few golden apple slices.

But that isn't the point. Tommy knows that the self-sacrificing nerd would literally throw himself into danger—he himself does that, too, but he was a part of war where he had to protect what he *loved*, and that doesn't count. He just...

How far would Izuku go? Hours ago—maybe even weeks, but he's truly acknowledging it now—Tommy had realized that Izuku would martyr himself twice over to save his friends, family, and any innocent bystander. He'd sacrifice himself for the hero system despite how shitty it is. Hell, Izuku would become Atlas—Tommy hides his flinch with a cough even though no one's watching—for the world even if it were on *fire*.

He'll do that shit for something as trivial as an entrance exam. Except, this one has robots that are actually fucking *dangerous*.

Tommy snaps out of it, hauling some more trash and junk over to train with from the small pile he and Tommy screamed at. A large punchbag stand with an actual punching bag hanging down from the top, probably one he's fixed before. It's ripped at some parts, whatever it was stuffed with spilling from the torn seams, but it's hanging and it'll have to be enough; Tommy will make it enough.

He spins Clara in between his fingers, relishing the gust of wind that comes with that cools his skin, and gets in his stance. With quick, agile swings, he strikes the bag in where he estimates a human's weaknesses are; a pressure point there, the gut here, solar plexus just above, the bridge of the nose just about here and the eyes near it there and there. Tommy's hits are as accurate and efficient as he can make them, the constant *thwap* of his barrage becoming white noise.

But it isn't enough to settle his anxiety, this underlying paranoia that claws at his thoughts and makes him hesitate. U.A. must have some expert medic or potion-brewer to pull shit as risky as literal battle robots, yet. What if they aren't fast enough? What if they underestimate someone's strength and the robots pummel them? What if they go rogue due to a security breach? The school must be a prime target for those experienced or courageous enough to try shit, but that doesn't dismiss the possibility of something happening.

(What if the golden apple slices aren't enough? What if they're too advanced or too much for the people in this server, because as far as he knows, no other golden apples exist besides his? What if Izuku is ripped away from him, just like how life has taken everything else? Like how it took Tubbo and Wilbur and Techno and Phil and Ranboo and Dream [well, he was nice. But no, wait—he isn't, never was, he's hurt him so much just to manipulate him—so why does Tommy miss him so dearly? Fuck, he can't find the answer] and even himself—

And Tommy can't—absolutely cannot handle something like that again. Can't handle another loss so grand; can't handle another betrayal, even if accidental, that runs too deep; can't handle another broken promise, another person he's failed. He just can't.)

Tommy bashes Clara into the side of the bag, shakily breathing as he watches it swing from side to side. The chains that suspend it are twisting, swiveling around itself, an entrancing show that captures Tommy's eyes. Its rings with a sharp, delicate clink, clink, *clink*, and he makes himself focus on that, on the rocking, steady swings that are akin to a beat. Left, right. Left, right. Left, right.

Tommy breathes. He finds a steady rhythm in his heart, latches onto it with broken nails and numb fingertips, and thinks about safety.

...He won't have that for a bit, really. Takoda's clean now; this can't be his base or home. People will start to visit, laying towels on the fresh sand and splash around in the waves, or bring drinks and food and a party. They'll see him, probably as some homeless nobody, and maybe take him to the authorities or something.

He needs to find a place to live. Potentially at Izuku's? Tommy still hasn't visited—no, his monumental fear of rejection prevented that for a bit, him making excuses to stall for time that sound horrid to himself. Still, the freckled teen said that his mom was kind, and Tommy doesn't remember his temporary one enough to know what that feels like, but she had to be better than Phil.

Yet he'd feel so guilty for just... suddenly appearing, another mouth to feed, another person to spend money on, another *liability*. And people usually don't like how loud he is, how childish he acts and all of his emotions and *trauma*. No one knows how to handle it—Tommy *himself* doesn't know how to tackle it, and that was even *with* Puffy's temporary therapy, for fucks sake. Izuku might, but Tommy can't risk his only friend in this place. Adding his trust issues, and that's practically impossible. *Tommy's* impossible; maybe that's why Dream was so obsessed with him.

Tommy sighs, adjusting his eye-patch and putting his forehead on Clara's upright end. It's uncomfortable, the flattened, circular metal digging into his forehead, but fuck that. He's just so *tired* of worrying, yet he can't help it.

Tommy hates it.

"Suck it up," Techno once said—harsh, but true. The best medicines have always been bitter. "In war, you would die. We—you and Wilbur are leading a revolution, a resistance, and that is infinitely more harder than war. Mostly everyone you know is against you. Any moment of weakness on the battleground, no matter how much it hurts, is fatal. It's how the world is—how the language of violence is spoken."

(Sometimes, Tommy thinks, under night skies and pinpricks of light, that he can't truly absorb the language of violence. He fights, sure—but that's last when it comes to everything else; a backup plan if all else goes wrong. And yet despite once inhabiting the house of the Angel of Death and the Blood God; despite once friendly sparring with the Masked Apotheosis; despite even learning how to fight from them all—Tommy is, ultimately, not good at combat as he should be. Or, at least, not as good as the others.

So he resorts to it in his last moments, when all else is futile and Tommy wants to keep going because he's stubborn, stubborn, stubborn and he wants to see everything to the bitter, bitter end, even if he dies.

Yes, Tommy is not built for the language of violence, he decides. The cacophony of guttural sounds and cries of agony woven between bear too much weight on himself. Techno is fit for it like a glove, however—all sharp edges and cutting ends—because he is the Blood God. He knows he can win with violence more than anything.

Maybe this is why they're not brothers anymore. Maybe they were never supposed to be.)

Tommy grunts, gets back to his feet, and bolts towards the punching bag.

It's three in the fucking afternoon.

"—t-those apple slices helped a lot! I may have, uh, used OFA during the exam—*and brokemyarmaswellasbothofmylegs*—but that isn't the point! Recovery Girl healed me up and the apples made it hurt less! Speaking of her, she's the t-third hero I've met in-person! The second is Present Mic, and—gosh, have I ever told you—?"

It's three in the fucking afternoon, and *this* is when this bitch gets here? Tommy gapes at the fucking *audacity* of his friend, himself standing near a decimated punching bag with Clara as he deciphers Izuku's hastily-spewed phrase. He almost drops Clara, yelping as he struggles to pick the staff up correctly. Bloody hell, Izuku's sense of priorities is *screwed*. Instead of—fucking—Tommy doesn't know, but he wants anything *but* Izuku casually walking up with bandages around his scars and starting a rant.

Speaking of that, he halts Izuku rant with a bonk to the back of his green head of hair. "Fuck you," Tommy murmurs with disdain. "Fuck you and your fucking habits and your stupid recklessness." Flinging himself around Izuku, Tommy forces him into a hug, still quietly cursing. "Fuck you, I *hate* you, you aren't allowed to do this shit to me you fucking *wrongun*—"

"Ah." Izuku laughs merrily as if he didn't break like three-fourths of his fucking *body*, "Sorry, Tommy, for worrying you. R-Recovery Girl withheld me from going here or home because she wanted to make sure I was really doing alright—scars and all. But! I have good news! ...And some bad news, but good news first!"

Tommy doesn't let go; however, he does raise his eyebrow in a silent gesture to go on. Izuku does. "I destroyed this huge r-robot—it was named the zero-pointer—made to be a distraction for all the other examiners with OFA! It's another part of why I was held back, too—had to recover my stamina because R-Recovery Girl took most of it healing me. I also got free juice, which is pretty poggers!

"And I talked to a girl that w-wasn't my mom. She was nice, y'know? I tripped on the pathway to the exam—hey, don't think I can't see you grinning—and she used her quirk so that I didn't truly fall. Helped me so that I didn't break the rest of my bones—oh, her Quirk's something to do with gravity manipulation, isn't that just so cool? Maybe she can make her gravity heavier or something? Ah, I really wanna ask—uh, anyway! She thanked me for helping her in the nurse's office! And I—well, I've never gotten that before, and I didn't know how to react so I made a f-f—a fool of myself, like usual.

"I-I'm not—*too* sure if this part's good news, but Ka-Kaccha—" Tommy scoffs. "Right, right—I'll say it, calm down. B... *Bakugo*; are you happy now? Anyways, B—Bakugo was less aggressive than usual. Didn't shout at me as much, or hit me, or anything, just like the entirety of the year after the Sludge Incident. It was weird b-because I thought he'd snap seeing me actually... you know, *trying*, but maybe it was because we were on U.A. and it probably has cameras everywhere.

"Onto the bad news. I—I used all the apple slices. Those were probably precious resources because they really boosted me when it came to the zero-pointer—maybe you could tell me what they do? Because *man*, I felt like I was on a power rush! My limbs were less purple and twisted than I expected thanks to them, and they even regenerated my bones quicker, apparently! I was unconscious when they did, thankfully. Ow, ow, loosen the grip a bit—thanks."

("Regeneration on wounds that are fatal," Niki once said, having known the most about first-aid and wounds out of the entirety of L'Manburg's army. She'd wrapped Tommy's arms in bandages soaked in regeneration potions, talking to keep Tommy's mind off of his pain. "Healing on regular wounds.")

"Regeneration heals what's most vital first—organs, bones, things like that. Then it moves up and up, like to the muscles, then tissue, then skin. Healing is bad for fatal wounds because it generalizes what it heals." A hiss, a curse; Niki barrels on. "Like, it would heal any damage from the organs, bones, muscles, tissue, skin and everything in between at once—it doesn't completely heal a fatal wound, unless you overdose. Potion overdose and its withdrawal is highly disorientating, hence why regeneration is better for things like this.

"Speaking of which... and... done!" Tommy ripped his bandaged arm away and glared at the white plaster and its little bow to tie it off. Niki, on the other hand, nodded with satisfaction at her handiwork out of the corner of his eye. "C'mon," she smiled, offering her hand. "We have a home to fight for.")

"I also... didn't get many points. Well, n-none at all, really. Couldn't do much without a Quirk, or a Quirk I'm not used to; the bots were too fast for me to disable them or something, and everyone kept stealing, and... and yeah. Adding to that, one of the participants—blue hair, serious eyebrows, glasses, formal speech mannerisms, rigid posture—already dislikes me. I just... I hope Shiketsu's exams are still open, and that they're easier."

Izuku sighs, leaning into Tommy's embrace, "I think that's it. I came here as soon as possible—mom doesn't know that I'm here, just that I may still be recovering. Visit?"

Tommy lets go, nodding after. He'd drank his soda long ago, just stalled the entire thing. "Yeah," he agrees, because Izuku deserves some good things for today, he thinks. "I gotta go at this point. Just because I'm gonna be polite 'n' shit doesn't mean that you're forgiven for breaking your body, though, bitch."

"Oh, Big Man *Tommy*," Izuku dramatically almost swoons with a weird voice change, and the accent and wording is so fucking horrid that Tommy *cackles*. "*Biggest of the Biggest Men, Apex Predator, the Best of the Best, the King of the World*, may such l-lowly scum like me be forgiven by your *sacred words* and *touching kindness*?"

"Sure," Tommy grins, snorting as eloquently and elegantly as one can. Izuku bows, shaking with a smile on his lips.

"Why thank you, Your Majesty!"

"As long as I'm given several sodas each day for the rest of the week—no fucking take-backs."

"Alrig—what?! Wait, wait wait wait—each day?! *Plural*?!"

"Not going then."

"*Tommyyyyyy!*"

He does go in the end, breaking from the constant begs from Izuku. They walk up the stairs of an apartment complex, the latter practically bouncing with excitement and anxiety. Tommy tugs Clara's retracted form lots, pulling and twisting her ends like a toy.

When they enter, Tommy doesn't know what to expect. Well, not *this*, at least.

"Oh, Izuku!" Izuku's mom calls out. There's the aroma of something good in the air—smells like that little cup Tari brought once that she called "instant noodles"—that makes Tommy's stomach growl embarrassingly. What follows soon after is the quiet clanking of metal, and soon, a plus-sized short lady comes rushing through. "Where were you? Wh-When the school called about you recovering, I was so worried—are you okay? Anything you need?"

The lady has green hair just like Izuku, along with his large viridian eyes. She fusses over her son, patting Izuku on his arms, legs, shoulders, face—anywhere she can check. Izuku hurriedly assures her he's fine, but she isn't having any of it, clearly. Then Izuku's mother beckons her son to lean down, giving a quick peck on his forehead before smiling. "I'm glad you're okay," she says, so many emotions in too little words. (...Was this what Phil was like to Wilbur? Was this like what Kristen was before she left...?)

Then, she's facing Tommy and oh, her eyes are too kind for someone like him. It makes him squirm uncomfortably. "You must be Tommy!" She exclaims with a beaming smile. Bowing, she raises her hands, presumably to clasp Tommy's in between them, but pauses at the scars on his calloused fingers and palms. "Is it okay if I hold your hands?" She asks.

And, oh, okay, wow. Tommy's never been asked for his boundaries before besides from Izuku. He's probably been staring too long, too busy trying to formulate an answer, but he almost can't. "...Okay," he settles with. Then, a bit louder—a bit more *certain*, "Okay, that's fine. You can."

Slowly, gently, the mother clasps her hands around his and looks up at him with a teary smile. "Thank you," she says, her entire *aura* like hot chocolate near a campfire on a winter night, "for helping my son. I can't thank you enough for being his friend—for seeing *him* and not just some Quirkless, weak boy." He can't help but notice how that isn't said with bitterness, resentment or pity, but *sympathy*. "But Izuku hasn't stopped talking about you for more than a few hours these past ten months—" Tommy grins abruptly, glancing at Izuku who's face is tomato red. Surely he's the one that made that little squeak, too, "—and you sound lovely! Come in, come in—I made katsudon for Izuku, but there's more if you want to help yourself to some!"

Prime, Tommy loves her already. "Thank you, Mrs. Midoriya."^[2]

The lady waves her hand, already turning around and heading further in her home. "No need for pleasantries or formality! Any friend of Izuku's is a friend of mine. Please, call me Inko."

Tommy's mind is, like, fried. "...Alright, Inko."

Still weary, Tommy heads further in, eyes scanning the small home. It looks like a cozy, organized place, with the usual furnishings that a house has—a couch, a few tables, a kitchen and... was that a TV? Tommy's never seen a working one before, besides the ones in Tari's, but those are for boring shit like the news, or for playing lofi music video playlists—he'll mess with it later. There's a few baby pictures (oh, Tommy's *so* gonna tease him about those later—especially about the "Might Man" All Might onesies pictures he can spot over there) and family photos hanging on its walls; none with a father figure. Several posters decorate the outside of what Tommy assumes is Izuku's room. Otherwise, besides the fact that there were no brewing stands, crafting tables, chests full of items,

traditional furnaces (at Tari's he found out that furnaces were shaped differently and had a multitude of options), or anything of the sort, it was normal.

"Make yourself at home." Someone says on his right. Tommy startles, whipping his head around to see Inko looking apologetic. "Oh, I'm sorry dear. Did I scare you? Sorry, sorry—I'll go in front of you next time before I speak. I just wanted to make sure you're doing alright here."

"I'm doing fine," Tommy affirms. What else was he supposed to say?

"That's good," she says, carefully pulling Tommy over to the dining table, Izuku already waiting there with a warm smile. He sees where Izuku got it from now. Inko rushes to the kitchen, bringing back three bowls of delicious katsudon, and dear Prime those smell heavenly, what the actual fuck. "Izuku's told me that you've been helping him out to exercise, yes?" Inko says. "Out on Takoda?" Tommy nods, giving him another one of Inko's soft smiles. (Reminds him of Niki. They'd get along well, huh?) "Oh, that's wonderful—thank you for lending him a hand with that, too."

Tommy flounders a bit with his chopsticks, eventually getting a hold on them. He hesitates, looking at the other two and how they say their thanks before eating, and right as they take a bite (not poisoned, it's *not* poisoned), Tommy chews—

—holy *shit* this is *good*! Why didn't people make these on other servers?! This was the best shit he's ever had!

Uncaring of his appearance, Tommy starts practically *inhaling* the katsudon. "This is so fucking good!" He exclaims between bites, taking a break a couple of times to let his stomach adjust—he still has a few problems with starvation, even now, but it's leagues better than before. Then, "...May I have seconds?"

Inko laughs, not reprimanding him for his profanity or lack of manners. Tommy relaxes just a bit. "Sure! You're always welcome to, and I'm happy you're enjoying the food."

She's *so* poggers—the *poggest*, one of the only women ever. Tommy says as such while she goes with his bowl for more; Izuku nods in solemn agreement, soon making an affirmative noise muffled by food.

"There's already a few whispers that the beach is cleaned," Inko continues, setting Tommy's bowl in front of him, "and that it's beautiful—we have to go there again some time! Oh! Izuku, I was also thinking; we have an extra room, right? Tommy could just stay there until he finds a more permanent residence. Ooh, we have extra clothes and furniture—that could work, right, Izuku?"

Tommy stifles, almost choking on his mouth full of the katsudon. Similarly, Izuku freezes, coughing a few times. Did he not know about this either? Was this just normal for Inko—to just—take in random people who decide to be her son's friend?

"M-Mom!" Izuku groans. "That was supposed to be a *secret*!" *What*.

"Oh, you haven't told him? Sorry, Izuku."

Tommy sets his partially-empty bowl down, laying his chopsticks on top not long after. "What the *fuck*," he questions, staring between the two, "is going on?"

Izuku sighs, putting his own bowl down. "Okay, so," Tommy begins, "I may h-have *accidentally* told her about your home situation."

"How the *fuck* do you *accidentally* tell someone that I'm homeless?"

"I-I just rambled about it, sorry!" Izuku ducks his head and looks away. "...You need a home anyway."

"It's his choice anyway," Inko interrupts. Then, with one of those fucking pure gentle smiles again, she turns to Tommy. "Would you like to stay here for the time being?"

And isn't that a loaded question.

"You don't have to!" Inko quickly rushes to explain, and Tommy thinks distantly that this is where Izuku's gotten his rambling from. "This would just be a small repayment compared to what you've helped me with! In the past few years, if not most of his life, I haven't been able to do what a mother should: be able to support my son throughout his life. I-I work a lot to keep this place, and I've seen what the school does to Izuku—how could I not when he asked for burn cream? But I haven't been able to take him out of Aldera because I can't save enough as a single mother, and... Well, when you appeared, he smiles more. Talks more, acts livelier, rambles a lot more often, and; he seems better. He *is* better. And I cannot thank you enough for that. I owe you so much for helping my son, so when I heard you were homeless, I wanted to know if you wanted to, y'know, live here?"

Tommy stares at her as if she were a genie saying she could do the impossible. No one's asked for him to stay with them besides Phil, back then. Izuku doesn't protest, either, and even when Phil was forced to take him in due to Wilbur, Techno had whined. No one's truly told him "thank you" besides Tubbo and Wilbur before the DreamSMP.

And he wants to say yes, but he's... *himself*.

He's Tommy Innit "Theseus" Craft, an enigma who's too selfish yet too selfless for strangers and friends who became them.

He's Tommy Innit "Theseus" Craft, the cause of several wars that decimated his nation, made his brother insane, destroyed everything he loved and left him to himself.

He's Tommy Innit "Theseus" Craft, the boy who trusts too much and betrays too often and weeps at the consequences.

He's Tommy Innit "Theseus" Craft, the boy who left his best friend to die; who left him to reign as a president too young.

He's Tommy Innit "Theseus" Craft, and nothing he touches ever lasts.

Tommy breathes. It's either leaving for another dump or living with his friend. (He can—he can be selfish here, for once, right?)

"Yeah," he responds, "I'd like that."

The room Tommy will reside in is filled with the little trinkets and knickknacks that he'd kept at Takoda. It has its own desk, window, bed, drawer, closet, and so many things other things that Tommy's never had in his own room, even before the DreamSMP. It's always weapons and glistening armor, potions and brewing stands, chests filled to the brim, clothes both dirty and clean on the ground and dirt, and cobblestone or wooden walls. Not as something as mundane as his chair that can swivel its seat around, or a few random books he chose sitting in the bookshelf.

He even gets a little nameplate in front of his door, a maroon rectangle with the words "TOMMY" scrawled onto it by himself with white marker, bordered in gold.

Tommy *adores* it.

Despite this, he heads out at night as Dusk hours after his room is sorted.

Sue him, but he can't change the fact that he's constantly restless. Regardless, he's been doing this for a couple of hours and said energy hasn't flickered in the slightest.

Tommy leaps high into the night as he aims for a rooftop. He uses Clara to assist himself and pull him like a pickaxe in ice, a boost he probably didn't need but still used. His shoes screech against the concrete, kicking up dust and dirt until he, without falter, keeps running.

His ears twitch; Tommy frowns. A whimper, the *shing!* of a weapon, a plea. Then, expertly, Tommy hops off the roof he's on and into an alleyway—right on to a murderer. His feet slam into the man's head without remorse.

The murderer becomes Tommy's cushion, knocked down to the ground while Tommy has one foot on top of his chest. The knife clatters to the ground several feet away, though he's pretty sure that the guy is knocked out. That's what a sudden weight of a teenager impacting one's brain does to a man.

Tommy turns to the victim—a woman who, with quavering hands, holds the strap of her dress up. *You good?* He signs. *Any assistance needed?*

She hesitates. "I-I can't understand y-you, Dusk. S-Sorry." It comes out as a whisper.

The vigilante nods, pulling a sticky note out. Before showing it he scrawls down, *'are you hurt?'*

"Ah, no," the victim replies after taking a bit to stare at the note—and hey, his writing was *perfectly* eligible, fuck anyone who says otherwise! "Thank you, Dusk."

Tommy smiles with his eye. *'no problem. go home now and stay safe. buy pepper spray in the mornin' for any other assaulters' eyes.'*

The woman's eyes widen, so she's probably reading the pepper spray part, before she nods, "Alright." Then, as she gets up, still holding her dress strap, she adds, "You stay safe too, okay? You're a good person."

Tommy flinches. He shakes his head and shoos her off.

Just as he ties the murder, stores the knife, and slaps a sticky note onto his forehead and his arm (the former with an L and a cartoonish face sticking its tongue out, the latter with another one of his complaints) after the lady's long gone, a streak of grey fabric shoots out. Tommy dodges by a hair, leaping back towards the dead-end of the alleyway—fuck, no escape, no *escape*—and wonders what underground hero patrols here. Not Nightwing or Hound, they get here a bit later on; not Terra or Paradox, either—they appear more so at dawn. So the last... one... is...

Oh, Prime. Fuck, shit, *shit*, Prime-damnit, what the *hell*. The one fucking time *Eraserhead* goes and patrols *here* is when Tommy is, too?

No, no, no, Tommy Innit is not going down to a *hobo* (even though he once was one.) He scowls underneath his mask, evading another calculated strike. The only disadvantage Tommy has is that it's

dark and he doesn't have any vision because the street lights here were fucking broken due to a rampant *Quirk* Prime damn it—

Focus. *Focus*, that's all he needs to do. He's fought in the dead of the night before. What can he do?

He can pull the fabric, tug Eraserhead off-balance—but the man's Quirk is active and he can control his grey scarf due to that. Something, something, hair in the scarf, Eraserhead's hair rising when his Quirk activated, more of Izuku's rambling, whatever. All that matters is that Tommy can't do that. Eraserhead has experience, anyway; people have probably tried that, once, and he knows how to deal with it, so that wouldn't work at all.

Wait. Scarf, *fabric*... Oh. This is such a fucking risk, but Tommy needs a *distraction*, not a fight.

From what he knows, Eraserhead's Quirk doesn't give him night-vision—he relies on sounds and predictions and the knowledge of his opponent in situations like this, just like him. Meaning, Tommy *also* has an advantage—only if the hero's goggles don't have night vision. Thank Prime taking items out of his inventory is a silent process.

Tommy lets the scarf come at him as he hears it rustle, inventory open and finger tapping on a specific icon. Then, just as it gets near, the vigilante grabs it. He yanks it back, feels the scarf twisting between his calloused palms, and before it can do shit, slices the Axe of Peace through the scarf. It may be reinforced with metal and interconnected with his Quirk, but metal is no match on Netherite.

As expected, the blade cuts through the fabric with ease. Tommy holds the shorter piece, feeling it go limp in his palm. Hastily, Tommy takes this moment of distraction (if he even has one) to dart up a wall with the weapon, digging the sharp end into the walls, and fucking *bolt it*. No more patrol today, nope, nuh-uh, no fucking way.

(Later, in his normal clothes, outfit and weapon safely tucked away, he ponders on it. Eraserhead could've still caught him. Why didn't he? Tommy's still this illegal fucking vigilante; it's a hero's job to capture people like him.

Tommy rubs his eyes and rolls over on his bed, adjusting his eyepatch off. He's run out of his hyper maniac energy for this shit.)

Chapter End Notes

1. ok so this says 10 bil 'cause bnha's supposedly set in the future and in 2023 we're at like, what, 8 bil? so . yeah. also ik the dsmp has like a lot less than that but i'm like. imagining civilians lived there, too, and it's not just the players yk? [\[return to text\]](#)

2. okay so i made inko more supportive n stuff of izu in this fic because honestly? w how im writing him i thought that if he didn't at least have smth, he'd prolly off himself a lot earlier. in most situations like this, hope, determination, and dreams are simply, like. *not enough* to give people a reason to live, yk?

'm not sure whether to keep this, though, because later on, in the wattpad ver. of this, i address how it takes away some of what makes her feel real. like,,,,, being a more supportive or perfect mother who's only absent due to work, or a conflicted one who didn't let her son dream despite

the weight of reality that'd crush him regardless, yk? not exactly how i worded it, but i hope y get what i mean,,,,,,,, [\[return to text\]](#)

edited mar. 9 2023 17:52/5:52PM for the THIRD TIME since i kept refreshing the page by accident

rising dawn.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"You sure I can stay here?"

Chewing the side of his cheek, Tommy observes where he stands in Izuku's room. All Might posters coat the walls and merchandise fill the shelves, and in any other situation Tommy would've laughed, because this is peak fanboy behavior.

The room is dark save for the covered window and Izuku's lamp that shines down on an innocent envelope with U.A.'s wax seal, the faint shadow of a disk-shaped item in it. Though this entire server is pretty fucking weird, this is a *very* fucking weird way to send a letter that holds the weight of Izuku's life in it. Apparently it holds the results from the exam—Toshinori hasn't said shit about what Izuku got, so Tommy's fucking valid for worrying.

Izuku nods, tugging Tommy further in while gently closing the door with his mother outside. (The fact that he wants him to see his results and not his own mom is... it's something.)

Tommy grimaces and hunches his shoulders, a sharp pang of trepidation seeping into his mind. He looks around again, the walls doing their fucking enclosure around him again. The dark *obsidian seems like a void as they step into the place that Eret has brought them, a few chests and a singular button placed inside. Their clothes are ripped and stitches litter the larger tears, hastily sewed. They are weak.*

They should've known to run. Should've ran when the pistons shifted, should've ran when Eret smiled as if he were at a funeral saying his final goodbye, should've—should've—

"It was never meant to be."

And Dream is there, watching him through the pinpricks of his mask with a streak of mania, chest heaving after each breath, fingers twitching, the crushed potato in his hand bloody and decimated. The pain is so minimal compared to the fear that claws at his mind and tells him to fucking run. Tells him to strangle the bastard, tells him to rip that stupid mask off, tells him to show that man he's a fucking mortal like everyone else.

But he can't move. Can't breathe, really, as his mind shuts down and his eye pulses with phantom pains.

The obsidian stained crimson is so, so cold compared to the glacial temperature of his skin.

"Tommy?" Izuku pinches Tommy with a tentative look. "C-Can you hear me?"

Tommy yelps at the sudden pin, glaring at the other with as much anger as he could without letting terror seep into his eye. He speaks, shoving that tremor down that threatens to make him garner sympathy and fucking *pity*, "I can hear perfectly fine. What the fuck do you want, bitch?"

"You were doing that thing again," Izuku shrugs, unlatching his window and leaving it open.

"What thing?"

"W-Where you're out of it." He turns his lights on, too the room bathed in it so suddenly it causes Tommy to flinch. As Tommy rubs his eye and mutters curses, Izuku pokes his head out of the room and says something to his mom, whom Tommy can now hear her footsteps fade. Izuku lets the door stay open.^[1]

"You're out of it, bitch," Tommy claims, his shoulders sagging just the slightest.

Izuku shakes his head. "Never mind. Sit down."

"But what about Inko?" Tommy protests, eyeing the two chairs near the desk. The anxiety gnaws at his skin. "She's your *mom*, and I'm just some dickhead who helped you."

"Exactly that! You're the person who's helped me!" Izuku says. "N-Not like my mom hasn't, but. You've been there with me more? Like—" He groans, collapsing on his seat. "You know what I mean, h-hopefully."

"And T's probably gonna be the one to tell us the results. He's working there, seeing as there are more sightings of him near U.A. Plus, I hold his Quirk. Mom..." Izuku looks down, murmuring, "She doesn't know about T's secret. Or that we're even in *contact* with him. I—you wouldn't even know, had you not been actively assisting me. T wouldn't be able to stay in his form for longer when you were there as the months went by, and you initially thought it was his Quirk *drawback* and not from a wound. I also may need the emotional support..." *For when it's revealed Izuku failed*, is left unsaid.

"I-I mean!" He stammers, lifting his head up, "It's not like my mom isn't good comfort! It's just. I think you'd understand better, y'know?"

Tommy sighs. Right—no one can gossip about this shit, so barely anyone knows. Even for someone as kind as Inko. And what had Tubbo said before, once? Traumatized minors had to stick together?

"And hey, you're not a stupid person," Izuku goes on. Tommy scoffs at the replacement for the swear; it wasn't even as bad as fuck! "You've helped me a lot. R-Really."

Though he distractedly nods, Tommy hesitates to sit down in the extra seat Izuku brought for him. Once he does he notices the seat is comfortable—*should* be comfortable—yet the anxiety rolling in his stomach makes him and the seat anything but. Nevertheless, Tommy stares at the small envelope, keeping his gaze on it even as he grumbles, "Sit the fuck down and open it already."

Izuku does settle, yet he doesn't move to open the letter. And if Tommy were to be in his position, barely getting anything in an exam he so desperately wanted to pass, he would have, too. But like the impatient fuck he is, Tommy snatches the thing and tears it open.

He pointedly ignores the indignant cry of protest that Izuku lets out, focusing on the disk that clatters down on the other's wooden desk. It lights up, something like a screen rising from the middle. Tommy glances in the envelope itself—no paper, no writing. Is the world too advanced for that, or is Izuku a special case?

"I am here as a projection!"

"Holy *shit*," Tommy breathes, looking back up just in time to see a fucking hologram appear. An image—a recording? A live feed? It's of Toshinori, dressed all proper and fancy, appears in a setting, shimmering from the hologram's lines. Only *Sam* would've been able to create shit like this.

(He misses Sam Nook and his chittering. No matter how much he hates reflecting on the SMP and all it's done to him, he can't deny that.)

...Does U.A. just give these out to *every* fucking participant? Oh, Prime. What the fuck is this server on to be this technologically advanced? What kind of redstone and command blocks are built into this single thing, and then all the other devices that this server's made? Phones, TVs, tablets, computers, games you can play on the four aforementioned machines, applications that range from something as simple as reminders to entire fantasy *worlds* stuffed in a little square...^[2] Tommy can't—*won't* attempt to imagine how overpowered the school is (and all the fear that comes with.)

Toshinori goes on, leaving the question unanswered—not a live feed, it seems. Apparently, the hero had to do paperwork, so he couldn't contact Izuku nor Tommy, which he apologized for with a bow. And, just like Izuku predicted, he transitions to state that he'd come to the town to work at U.A. How much time does Izuku even spend scouring news forums and writing everything down?

...Maybe he doesn't want to know.

Due to a signal to hurry up from somewhere they can't see, Toshinori finally starts getting to the point. Tommy focuses on the man, having zoned out until now. "Even if you passed the written exam," the hero states, "you, Young Midoriya, got zero points on the practical exam. Of course, that means you didn't pass."

At that, Izuku clutches the legs of his pants, hanging his head shamefully. Tommy can see the telltale signs of his tears. "I know that," Izuku whispers, voice trailing off into the start of a sob. "I *knew* that. I knew that, but..." Tommy purses his lips and slowly sets a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"...if that was all there was to it."

Tommy snaps his head up, feeling the other's head do the same with the sudden stiffness of his shoulders. Oh this fucking *bastard*—

"I am an entertainer, as well!" All Might exclaims, turning to point a small, white remote behind him. The screen that it's pointed to flickers once a button is pressed, changing to a different scene as the camera homes in on it. "First, you two, take a look at this video!"

A girl appears on the screen. She's dressed in what Tommy can only assume is a school uniform, though it does look like a sailor's clothing. She has short brown hair that seems to defy gravity, two long bangs framing her face. Her eyes are doe-like, large, and curious, the blush dusting her cheeks a seemingly permanent characteristic.

Izuku sits straighter, eyes gazing wide-eyed at the hologram. "The nice person?" He quietly says. Tommy raises a questioning eyebrow, but Izuku either doesn't notice or is refusing to acknowledge it.

"Excuse me, um..." The person stammers, stepping forwards.

All Might interrupts. "She came to negotiate directly in-person after the exams!" Prime, could he *not* interrupt? Thankfully, the hero leans forwards, "Negotiate what, exactly? Keep watching to find out!"

The camera switches. The stranger is now standing in front of someone else—one of the (there's an Admin they're an Admin they're going to hurt her going to hurt hurt *hurt he has to help her*—) onlookers of the exam, maybe? A judge? Nevertheless, the fucker's got a weird style. Not as weird as maybe Fundy or Ranboo (he can't think of them right now what is he *doing*), but weird nonetheless. Their hair is literally like a banana, standing tall and upright and colored the shade of a banana's skin.

Tommy can *see* the reflection of the sheer amount of gel in it from here, what the *fuck*. They're also wearing a leather costume of some sort, from the little pixels Tommy can observe.

"Um," the girl starts, motioning with her hands as she asks, "you know the person with the curly hair and freckles? Uh... kind of plain-looking? Is it possible to give him some of my points?" She asks. Izuku's breath hitches. "I heard him say, 'If I could just get one more point,' so I thought that maybe he was still at zero points... At least the points he lost because of me! He saved me! Please! Please! Please!"

Izuku stands, staggering. The video pauses.

"In addition to having a Quirk," All Might explains, "Your actions spurred others to act." He turns. "The entrance exam the other day was not graded only on villain points!"

What?

The video unpauses. "Even if you ask to," the unknown—wait, oh *shit*, that's Present Mic, literally the bloke on the ragged radio he kept. That's what he looks like? Huh. *Present Mic* continues, "you can't give him your points. Anyway, there's no reason to give him any, female listener!" The hero reaches out, gently patting the girl on the head.

What?

All Might stands in front of the video, the camera zooming out. "How can a hero course reject people who save others and do the right thing?" The number one hero says and oh, *oh*, Tommy fucking *gets it*. A grin stretches on his lips while in his peripheral vision, Izuku gapes. For good measure, Tommy grips his arm to make sure he knows this is fucking real. "Call that lip service? Bring it on!" All Might resumes, "This is a job that requires risking one's life to put that lip service into practice!"

"Rescue points! And they're given by a panel of judges. It's the other basic ability we at U.A. look at!"

Izuku Midoriya | Villain - 0 | Rescue - 60 |

"Holy shit," Tommy whispers, staring at the holographic scoreboard. He raises his voice, beaming. "Holy *shit*!"

"Izuku Midoriya, sixty points!" The scene changes back to the girl, the sector of her name with the scoreboard right above her head. "And Ochako Uraraka, forty-five points!"

All Might turns. Tommy can affirm he's proud when he says, "You and her passed."

Izuku gawks with uncertainty. "No way," he says, disbelieving and a wobble to his tone, "No way. This is too insane."

"Young Midoriya; *this is your hero academia!*"

"Y-Yes, sir!" Izuku snuffles, eyes tearing up.

Tommy fucking *whoops* in joy.

"Big T!" Tommy roars, running down Takoda to the man currently in his deflated form, casual clothing hanging off of his stick-like figure. The moon shines overhead, stars twinkling around it, all covering the beach in a pleasant silver moonlight. He almost expects to trip over some junk but is

both surprised and satisfied when he doesn't. The blond teen almost slams the currently fragile hero down, restraining himself just enough to stop in the nick of time. His marginally torn sneakers make imprints in the sand, a little dent in the seaside from where he stands just inches away from crashing into the hero. "What the *fuck*, man!"

"All—I-I mean, T!" Izuku cries, rushing over not far behind. And then he promptly fucking *bursts into tears* and after all this time, Tommy still doesn't know how big his tear ducts were, how he holds all of that in, and how he can fucking stop it.

The hero spews blood in surprise, the amount of it making Tommy wince. Prime, should he give him a few golden apple slices? Do they fix missing organs? Do they fix Toshinori's type of wound? Tommy's never been in a situation wherein he's seen someone consuming an apple and regenerating their organs. Or limbs.

(Does he trust the hero enough, despite the shitty hero system?)

...Fuck it.

Tommy pops his inventory out, taking out a few slices. The way the moonlight reflects on its golden skin makes it appear ethereal, and he can't help but stare at it for a few moments too long. Nevertheless, he snaps out of it and hands some over to the curious eyes of Toshinori. "Fucking take these," Tommy grumbles, dumping the slices in the man's palms, "and eat them. They heal."

Toshinori opens his mouth, eyebrows scrunched in hesitance. "T-They do!" Izuku attests, urging the man to eat the golden apple slices. While finally fucking does, Izuku turns to Tommy. "Why didn't we give him these earlier?!" He hisses, though there's no real anger in his tone.

"Wasn't sure if they could heal missing organs 'n' shit," Tommy responds, watching the hero light up with an incredulous expression plastered all over his face. Colored pink-magenta-ish steam seeps from the man's pores, a sign that the effects are taking place. Toshinori's skin already looks fuller, too. Huh. "They're precious items, anyway—I can't grow them with their seeds. That just makes them normal, albeit sweeter, larger apples."^[3]

Before the man can speak, because Tommy's absolutely not letting him have more nor know how he got the golden apple slices, he scowls and gets to his point. "Anyway! You *prick*, you fuckin' *wrongun'*, you could've shot us a quick text that you had work an' shit! Not do so during the fucking *exam results*!"

Izuku frowns, reminding Tommy of how much of a simp this guy is. "But he's a *top hero*! He's got a lot to do!"

"Shut up, you All Might apologist fanboy—you don't get to say shit."

The All Might apologist and therefore complete wrongun' squawks in offense. Suck it, dickhead.

"A-Anyway," Toshinori placates, placing a hand on Izuku's shoulder yet hesitating to do so on Tommy's, "congrats on getting accepted, Young Midoriya." He raises a hand and Izuku high-fives it eagerly.

"T-Thank you very much!" Izuku beams.

Tommy scoffs. See?

"And thank you, Young Tommy," the hero says, "for helping." Tommy grunts a "you're welcome, old man" under his breath. Louder, though, he says, "I'm not fucking young. Stop calling me that shit. Call me Big Man Tommy Innit."

"Just so you know, I didn't tell the school about my connection to you, Young Midoriya," the hero continues on, and Prime, Tommy doesn't know if that's the worst or mediocre fucking decision the man has made. Because Toshinori isn't subtle. At all. He fucking sucks at not standing out precisely because his Quirk is all flashy and shit, hence why he's the top hero.

Izuku isn't subtle either. He either mutters everything out-loud, is easy to read as an open book, lies horribly, or blurts it out on accident. This probably wouldn't go well.

But then again... "You're the type that would think it's cheating if I did, right?" Toshinori says, Tommy considering that as he reflects on the man's decision. "I wasn't one of the judges."

"Th-Thank you for your concern!" Izuku bows.

Total All Might apologist.

"I-I wasn't too surprised to find out that you were a teacher at U.A., actually!" Izuku goes into his time-to-rant-about-my-favorite-hero-for-the-nth-time and oh, *fuck* no. "That was why you came here. After all, your agency is in Roppongi in Minato, Tokyo at—"

Tommy shoves an elbow into his friend's chest, Izuku hissing and sending a pout to him in response. At least he actually *listened* this time instead of being a little shit and continue to rant off. "Don't you fucking *dare*," Tommy exasperatedly groans. When the other just sticks his tongue out, Tommy gasps in mock offense and almost starts to pummel his ass.

But then Toshinori sighs, turning to the glistening ocean with a heavy sort of tone. That brings both Tommy and Izuku's eyes on him, the atmosphere turned solemn. "I couldn't tell anyone before the school announced it." Toshinori admits. "I just happened to be offered a job in U.A. while I was searching for a successor." At that, Izuku blinks, processing something before staring at his hands with a despairing look.

"...My body broke with one kick and one punch with OFA," he states. "I can't control it at all."

"That can't be helped," Tommy hums. "As the old man said, even before the exam, you were a vessel made as fast as he could with the time he was given. Or some shit like that. It's like if you asked a person who suddenly grew a tail to fucking do something like a trick with it; they wouldn't be able to control it." Toshinori nods in agreement.

"I—but you knew about it, then!" Izuku says, turning to All Might with a frown.

"Well, there wasn't any time; but it turned out alright," the hero replies. "It turned out 'All Might!'"

Tommy groans.

Ignorant of Tommy's pain, the hero continues past that Prime-awful joke, picking up a few spray cans on the ground. "Right now, you're either at a hundred percent or at zero. But once you can control it, you'll be able to adjust to what you can handle."

"Control?"

"Think of it as a glass cup that you can mould. The more you train a vessel—or, for the example, the more you practice moulding the glass, the more you'll be able to move and shape your power freely." With a slight burst of steam, Toshinori puffs up to his hero form, crushing the aluminum in his now-meaty palm. "Like this," he says, and Prime *damn it*, for someone who's the top hero this man is fucking stupid most times.

Tommy hisses, garnering their attention. "You *fuck!*" He curses. "This is a public area! There's people *right there*, *why did you transform—?!*"

"Wait, is that All Might?!" A look of anguish sets in on Toshinori's face. Tommy wants to laugh at it.

"No *way!* When did he get here?!"

Tommy can't hear any of the other exclamations because he's already grabbed Izuku and started *running*, the other stumbling before bolting with him in tandem. All Might sprints close behind, soon running ahead of the two teenagers. Tommy curses under his breath the entire time, a string of nasty, foul-mouthed words that'd make a sailor blush as he hears the footsteps of people nearby and sees the flashes of cameras in his peripheral vision. The night sky isn't helping for shit.

Fucking *hell*, Tommy should've *never* signed up for this.

"Izuku, do you have tissues?"

"Yeah."

"And your handkerchief? What about your handkerchief? Your hanky?" Tommy quietly snorts and is given a glare.

Izuku's going to U.A. for the first time, and Tommy watches as his mother continuously frets over him. He himself had been (*not clingy not clingy fuck OFF*) a bit closer to the other teen this morning, having reviewed what he'd taught Izuku about fighting and whatnot. Made sure to also give Izuku his number because they didn't do that earlier—thankfully, his communicator allows it. With all the training, the U.A. exams and shit, they hadn't thought of it.

"I have everything! I'm going to be late," Izuku grumbles, tying his second shoe off and standing up. He swings his yellow backpack on his shoulder with one swift movement as he walks towards the apartment door. "I have to hurry."

"Izuku!" Inko calls out, just as he opens the door.

"What is it?!" Thank Prime Tommy's rubbed off of Izuku and given him a little backbone. They're still working on that.

Looking up with unshed tears, Inko smiles. "You're really cool."

Tommy grins from where he stands on the side, giving him a thumbs up. "You'll kick ass, don't worry about it!"

Izuku beams so brightly it crinkles his eyes closed, doing a little two-fingered salute. "I'm off!"

The first four messages Tommy gets from Izuku are these:

[Sent 1 Attachment]

<lovable cockroach> hey tommy! just letting you know that this is on my finger because i broke it with ofa. dw, recovery girl healed it! i also made friends (*'~'*)

<lovable cockroach> is it ok if i introduce you to them some time? they're really nice

<lovable cockroach> ... and my teacher may or may not despise me already?

Tommy shoves a pillow into his face and screams.

(Later, when Izuku gets home, Tommy lets him live as he carefully unwraps the bandages on the finger and assesses it while Izuku rants about his day and the heroes and friends he's met.)

Tommy sits in his room—Prime, he still can't believe Inko gave him a *room*. She's so poggers. Anyway, he's sitting there after Inko's gone to work and Izuku is distracted, and thinks about making a crafting table.

There's, of course, enough room due to the fact that Tommy didn't have much outside belongings to begin with, even after Takoda. He also has enough planks from the DreamSMP, meaning that he doesn't have to go out and cut down a tree in the slums or some shit. But that also means he's limited in the number of sticks, and therefore tools, he can make. Out of the nine planks that he has, he can only make four sticks after he makes a crafting table, one of which would be used to craft a sword for once because Tommy still won't use the Axe of Peace, meaning that he'll have three remaining sticks and one plank.

Tommy stands, popping his inventory open with a quick flick and looking for the remaining planks. Most of the things in his inventory he'd left untouched, unsure of when to use them. Regardless, he drags the icon for the nine planks into his miniature crafting table, creating a crafting table and some sticks.

In this world, he'd seen people physically cut the wood into planks instead of crafting it, or chop down trees with tools instead of their hands. Which is pretty fucking stupid, because all the players were related to Mojang, the "Olde God of Creation," so they should just be able to chop the tree down with their palms and shit. Another weird thing to add to his list of unnatural things in this weird server.

The story of those powers, drilled into his head before the DreamSMP and SMPEarth by Phil, was that the original twenty players created by Mojang had gotten greedy and took a piece of Mojang, consuming said piece and therefore gaining a twentieth of the god's power. Pretty fucking weirdchamp, but true. In a rage, Mojang conjured the undead and let them swarm the underground in all of the servers created and beyond, creating spawners and spider-infested mineshafts, and the like. Places like 2b2t got the most of the brunt, the god's hatred seeping into the players themselves.

With the remains of their powers, the deity created two realms, the Nether and the End, to help stabilize the universe in their absence, along with several unique mobs. Tommy can't remember much about their folklore, though the End does have to do with protecting something.

However, that wasn't the point. The *point* was that due to the players consuming Mojang's power, they basically became gods. Then they split off, ten of the players creating a religion called Youtube and the other ten naming one Prime. From what he's heard, the two religions are friendly with each other. Sort of.

Regardless, the powers that all players were given were an inventory, holographic-esque panels that allowed them to make what was needed without much hassle, a constantly updating recipe book, partial poison resistance, et cetera. This long list included being able to cut down trees with their bare palms.

Tommy huffs, feeling the weight of the crafting table in his inventory before setting it down in front of him. It thumps against the wooden floorboards of his room, the iron tools built with it clanking against each other as they gently swing. He stares at it, reaching out to feel the wood underneath his fingers, every ridge and smoothed surface, every leather strap and polished handle on the sides.

He taps the center on the surface, watching a familiar crafting hologram pop up with awe. It looks... completely normal, really.

Okay. Okay, this is real. Tommy hadn't thought it'd work. (He pinches himself, just to be sure.)

Tommy pops his own inventory up and brings two planks to the other projection, along with a stick. He puts them into the formation for a sword, watching with glee as the tool's icon appears on the right. Then, plucking that into his inventory, Tommy pulls it out with hardly hidden anticipation.

A real, honest-to-Prime blade, albeit basic, comes out in one fluid motion. Tommy almost roars in delight, biting his tongue because there's neighbors here, damn it, and he doesn't want Inko to have any more troubles. But he does let a few involuntary noises slip, and Prime, this was great. Having a weighted blade in his hands for once instead of a staff or an axe—this is *exhilarating*. Tommy even swings it around a few times to test its authenticity and fuck yeah, it swings like any other blade. Oh, he's *so* going to test this out at Takoda. Probably at night.

(He tries crafting a golden apple, watching the crafting interface with anticipation.

It doesn't work.)

...Which is how he finds himself at three in the morning, stealthily moving to Izuku's room and gently knocking on his window after being unable to sleep due to insomnia and his pure excitement. The response he gets is surprisingly quick, Izuku unlocking his window with a frown and watching mostly unperturbed as Tommy hops in. Izuku's hair is disheveled more than usual, and he leans on one side as his head nods off, rubbing his eyes. "What..." Izuku yawns, "T-Tommy? What're you... doing."

"Check this out, bitch!" Tommy whisper-yells, taking his wooden sword out. In his peripheral vision, Izuku's gaping, wide awake as he swings it around with expertise. "I could make a crafting table and I made a *sword*!"

Tommy soon frowns, lowering the blade. "Couldn't make anything else, though—I ran out of sticks. And materials. Do you know a few places where I can make a mine and get some free wood?"

Izuku blinks. "Crafting table...?" He murmurs, confusion evident in his tone. Then, with a visible shake of his head, the teen pipes up, "I do-don't know a place for any of those, but I *do* know a large forest nearby that no one really goes into. Me and Ka—*Bakugo* played there with some of his lackeys when we were younger and didn't have quirks. Does that work?"

Tommy *beams*. "*Fuck yeah* it does!"

omake:

Tommy nudges Izuku's shoulder. "So you're the Wife Haver now, huh?"

"I—Wh—N-N-Now's not the time for that!" Izuku all but screams, Tommy delightfully cackling because of the embarrassed blush that creeps on his friend's face and the way he burrows his head into his arms.

1. izu's prolly observed tommy too much an put lots of details in his analysis books, so he knows that tommy Hates being put in a small room. he can't really. expand his room, or go to the living room because then inko would have to know about AM and their relation, so he instead opens his window and door to make sure that tommy knows he has an escape, that he isn't trapped. and also turns on the lights for extra measure cause he's thoughtful like that imo [\[return to text\]](#)

2. tommy's communicator — or all the communicators built by sam or given out by dream, don't count. they're like partial phones? like. he can talk with others via a "whispering" mechanism, he can press tab to see the players, and he can communicate from far distances — basically, it does all the outside minecraft commands. want to leave a server? just press a few buttons, watch as a server list hologram pops up for all the ones you've been invited to and have been in and single-player survival worlds, and just tap one an go [\[return to text\]](#)

3.i know i made tommy plant a tree w/ a golden apple seed, don't remember the chapter however,,, though he did plant one! it's just a tiny, tiny detail [\[return to text\]](#)

edited mar. 10 2023 9:49

one step forward.

Chapter Notes

the second piece of art shown in this chapter is by @Purple-Kistune on wattpad!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Despite it being dark out, Tommy can make out the faint forms of branches and leaves. He's sure that the branch he's crouching on can support his weight long enough, but there's still a lingering fear of falling that claws at him. Regardless, he pulls on a particularly thick, long branch until it breaks off the actual tree with a snap. He flinches but puts the three logs he's received from the branch into his inventory. Then he moves on to the next branch he can reach, plucking them off the trunk one by one.

In his inventory, Tommy's already got a stack of logs from several trees in the area. It would be more than enough for a set of wooden tools, but it's always good to have extra. This would be the last tree anyways.

When he finally takes the trunk of the tree block by block, Tommy turns and is unsurprised to see Izuku gaping at him. How long did it take for him to get here? Tommy hadn't heard him walk towards him while he was plucking logs like apples. Or was he in The Zone?

Izuku seems to be under a trance, eyes dazed, before blinking. "You—I'm?" Izuku stutters, rubbing his eyes. "Oh my *G-God*, Tommy, that was so f-freaking *cool*! How did y-you do that? Wasn't your Quirk just an inventory thing? Can you do that to everything? Does the amount of time it takes to do that differentiate depending on what you're breaking? Or is it the same amount of time as a log? Is there a limit as to how long you can do that? How does it even work? How do you get perfectly built blocks of wood using your *hands*—?!"

Tommy preens as Izuku bounces in his place, fingers twitching, probably for his notebook. "It's another aspect of my quirk, Big Man," he answers, and is it a lie if it comes from his blood? "My Quirk isn't necessarily just an inventory, but more like a game? Besides the inventory and the whole block thing and shit, there's a multitude of things that I can do, like see my status in terms of health or if I'm under an effect, and I think I'm semi-immune to any poison—"

"You're *WHAT*—?!"

"Fffucking hell don't fucking scream right now it's three in the fucking *morning*—"

Tommy hurriedly shushes him anyways by slamming his cupped palm over the other's mouth. Just to stop him from mumbling until Tommy went deaf. And Izuku, like the fucking heathen and wrongun' and absolute *bitch* he is, *licks it*.

"EUGH!" Tommy shrieks, shaking his hand. Distantly, a few birds fly off, startled. "WHAT THE *FUCK*, MAN?!" Izuku just fucking *giggles* as if he hadn't committed the worst crime ever. Giggles! The fucking *audacity*.

Tommy huffs, dragging his palm over the legs of his shorts repeatedly. "You are a heathen and wrongun' and bitch, you know that?" He states with a glare. If he didn't know how to get back to the

apartment complex, he'd start a spar right now.

"Yeah, but I'm a loveable one."

"Fuck you!"

"Didn't even d-deny it!"

Tommy huffs once more, ignoring that fucking angel-turned-hellion, and busies himself with the original crafting table he made from the apartment. He quickly turns the logs into planks, some planks into sticks, and forms an entire set of wooden tools minus the hoe. Then, with experience, he equips the shovel in his hotbar and digs the spade into the ground, using his foot to uplift a square mound of dirt and grass. Tommy repeats this again and again until the spade hits stone.

"You know the way here, right?" Tommy absentmindedly says, swiftly switching to a pickaxe. "Memorized it an' shit with your nerdy brain?"

"Yeah?" Izuku says after a pause, enraptured as he leans over the hole Tommy dug.

"Good," Tommy grunts, slamming the tip of his pickaxe into the stone and watching cracks form, "because *this* will be my mineshaft."

It's four in the morning on a school day and Tommy has found thirty-five blocks of raw iron and more than a stack of coal, including the ones in the furnaces he's built, which shouldn't be possible. There's never this much ore in one small area—Mojang made sure of it. Was it because this place was far off? Does this world have some cracked fucking ore distribution?

Nevertheless, Tommy isn't unsatisfied! No, no, he's fucking delighted, the massive ear-to-ear grin on his face indicating that.

He's dug a bit so that he can have a small cavern with the barest essentials for a main base, of course connected to the fresh mine he made. Tommy's perched on two chests he set down on each other, swinging his legs idly as he watches the furnaces he's built smelt the raw iron he's collected. His pickaxe leans nearby, as well as the crafting table he first made. Torches burn in the small area, one for each corner, illuminating every crevasse and filling the small cavern with warmth. Izuku's settled himself on the stone ground, watching the flames flicker and the iron smelt with fascination.

"...Does it really just turn into iron ingots automatically?" Izuku asks after a small gulp. He'd made his throat sore from all the questions he was asking Tommy beforehand.

"Yeah!" Tommy says excitedly, haltingly hopping down the chests. He taps the tops of the furnaces, buzzing with animated energy, and takes whatever ingots are there for now—a nice fifteen total from both furnaces—before smoothly transitioning to the crafting table. His calloused hands hover over the hologram that pops up, turning to the green haired teen. "You want a sword? A pickaxe? An axe?"

"Um..." Izuku tilts his head. "You said you could do a water bucket thing, right? Can you... show me?"

Almost like whiplash, the green haired teen waves his hands around frantically. "Y-You don't have to! I-I-I know y-you're afraid of heights and, I mean, I-I was just curious and all and I just—"

"Alright," Tommy decides, thinking about an open plain near a shore, looking down on ruins and reaching out to touch the clouds on a pillar. Before he knows it, an empty bucket is in his hands. Izuku

freezes; Tommy breathes. "Alright, I'll show you."

It's about time that he at least can push through his trauma, this tidbit specifically.

Gradually going up the stairs of his personal mineshaft, Tommy steps out of the mine through the camouflaged trapdoors, and glances around. Izuku had said there was a stream down here and... There—a river, glistening under the moon and flowing with water. A log settles just over it, the perfect spot to fill the bucket. Without looking back, Tommy walks over to it—Izuku will follow regardless.

Crouching over the stream on the log, the teen dips the bucket and scoops an average amount of water inside. He straightens, closing trembling fists (what if he can't make it what if he doesn't pull it off in time) before asking, "Where's the highest point of this place?"

"Ah," Izuku purses his lips, "I'm... not sure. Me and K—Bakugo didn't really go this far out. Well, maybe he did—I-I wasn't a part of his explorations after he found out I was..." Then, "What does height have to do with anything?"

Tommy nods, ignoring the question. "Then I'll build one myself."

"...Huh—?"

Feeling the rough texture of bark in his hands, Tommy jumps and places block after block underneath him. Izuku rapidly blinks, staring up and up as Tommy builds higher and higher. His eye glances down, glimpsing at the branches and leaves sticking out of the logs and oh, Prime. It's as long as the amount of logs he has—a high count of fifty-six, him using eight of the other logs to make planks and sticks.

Taking a steadying breath, Tommy flicks his wrist and does not look down. He selects the water bucket in his inventory and clutches its handle like a life line and does not look down. Because he's fine with heights as a vigilante—as Dusk—but as Tommy? As Tommy, when there's no danger around to prioritize, no calculations and where-are-their-weak-points-chest-open-heavily-leaning-on-left-right-open-clearly-unexperienced to think about, no hazardous thoughts in his head, he can't focus on anything else but the distance between him and the world, even if it's small.

Twenty-three blocks above can kill him. Fifty-six blocks is worse. He does not look down.

...Falling from heights used to be fun. Feeling the wind in his hair, the rush in his veins, the feeling of falling and feeling weightless and being *alive* for once—that was fun. And then, the sensation of the wings of an elytra on his back flaring out with a flourish, sensing the sudden glide of wings helping him *soar* further, leaning just right to go higher, using the combined momentum of garnered speed and rockets to launch himself upwards...

He used to think of himself as someone truly high and mighty instead of a waste of space in a legendary family, up there—thinking of himself as Tommy Innit Craft, *sovereign* of the skies, screaming that silly title while his fingertips brush the outside of a cloud, droplets forming on the soft pads...

Tommy misses those times.

He could get those back. He *wants* to have those back, just like an anchor in this world from his old one.

Another breath. His shaking hands grip the handle tight until white bleeds through his knuckles. Tommy closes his eyes, grabs his unstable resolve by the throat,

and falls.

Tommy distantly hears the scream Izuku lets out. Its so unbelievably quiet, so minuscule compared to the wind that howls in his ears, the adrenaline that rushes through his veins, and the pounding of his heart. His hair whips through the wind and he can't open his eyes due to the terror whose talons bury into his skin like a parasite, but that's fine. He's MLG'd so many times with a water bucket that it's practically muscle memory.

(But it's too much like standing over a pillar of a mishmash of blocks, looking overhead, feeling the wind caress his face. Like wondering how Death would be the most merciful because she always is, even before then; how he is useless and unwanted and unneeded and unloved and horrible and selfish and greedy and wrong and needs to be fixed. Like wondering what it would be like to be free if he just let go. Of a world where Tommy Innit "Theseus" Craft doesn't exist, and the world isn't affected.)

If Izuku wasn't shrieking and if Tommy himself wasn't fucking terrified, then he would've laughed with glee. Because there's that phantom sensation of artificial wings bursting out with dramatic flare, stars glittering in the interior, constellations shimmering in the dawning light. Yet now, Tommy doesn't know how many lives he has left, but what he does know is that people only have one life here, and that may just fucking apply to him too. And the way to Death, not Death herself, is not as merciful as its incarnate.

At the right moment, Tommy flips the bucket he's clutching and *pushes*, feeling something ancient within him follow suit. There's nothing, and he almost starts to despair as the ground gets closer and closer, before water starts flowing out of the metal container like a rising whirlpool. It spreads out and *swirls* upwards, elegant and graceful and stunning around Tommy, glistening with moonlight, cradling without touching him like a loose cocoon. Not a drop gets on him, and he can feel his shoes dip into the lowermost part of the rising waves but they stay dry. And for a second, he feels pure *exhilaration*.



When Tommy has both feet touch the ground, the water is still whirling, its tendrils still curving above and spreading out, out, out like a blossoming flower, before it starts to collapse. Tommy laps up the largest source near the middle with his bucket, that timeworn feeling coming back as the liquid is quickly pulled back into the iron container. Droplets cling to the little blades of grass and the leaves up above around him, but most of the liquid is quickly tugged back into its confines.

Tommy breathes, shaky and hesitant, but he is alive.

Oh *fuck*, he's alive.

He smiles, seeing his reflection in the rippling water that settles back into the bucket. That turns into giggles, then into laughter, then to cackles of delight. He sets the bucket down with trembling hands, almost knocking it over in the process as he doubles over himself, his back hitting the pole he'd built. As much as he wants his hysterics to stop, he can't find it in him to even pause for air.

Because, because holy shit, that *worked*. And it was *so fucking poggers*. He's not even terrified, which makes sense because Big Man Tommy Innit is never fucking (*allowed to be*—no. Tommy Innit is

never) scared, but Prime... He's alive. He's alive, and he has something to live for, and he is okay.

Feet pound against the terrain and Tommy can barely react before Izuku rams himself into the blond with a cry of, "Tommy!" And oh, there's arms squeezing his torso and a face burying into him like no tomorrow. (If Tommy flicked his inventory open, fingers hovering just over Clara's icon, eyes sharpened and ready to fight, well. No one else can see his inventory anyways.) "Tommy you're alive, you're alive, you're alive," Izuku mumbles like a mantra. Tommy can accept this breach of personal space for now.

The blond teen laughs, something relieved and light, gently patting Izuku on his side—dickhead was squeezing his arms, too, so he couldn't do much beside that. The only response he gets is a tighter squeeze. "Of course I am, Big Man. A simple fall wouldn't kill me! ...Also, can you let go a bit? Crushin' my insides 'n' shit."

Izuku looks up just to glare, lightly smacking his fist onto Tommy's mid torso. He does loosen his grip though, which Tommy thinks is a score. "I didn't know that you'd live!" Izuku exclaims, emphasizing this with another smack. "What—I'm—how do you expect me to react when you just, fall off a tower of logs that high with just a water bucket?!"

"Right, right," Tommy sighs, worming an arm out of the vice-like grip and around Izuku. "You didn't know, and I was reckless. I'm sorry."

Izuku loosens his grip, almost enough for Tommy to slip out.

"...but it *was* pretty poggers, innit?"

Tommy squawks as he's promptly dragged and thrown into the nearby stream he'd filled his bucket from.

Patrols get easier after that. He's made some specific adjustments to the new iron chestplate, leggings, and boots he now wears underneath his armor, as well as a pair of vambraces and greaves. They're designed specifically to be as durable as possible while allowing him his agility, because Tommy is nothing if not swift. Adding to that, the logs and materials he got let him make several tools and items that he keeps in his hotbar, a good way to at least lessen the drawbacks of the weight of his inventory.

Tommy brings a full water bucket in his inventory wherever he goes during his patrols. He can look down a building and not snap his head up and busy himself with something to ignore the sweat on his palms and how endearing the fall looked. He can look down a building, watch the cars pass by, the people chattering their way to work, see dogs and cats trot about, and move on without much fanfare. Yes, he still has a lot to heal—the feeling of freedom feels so real still, when he looks down for too long. It's just within his grasp, fingers brushing its welcoming exterior and—

It's become easier to shove those kinds of thoughts away.

He's *healing*. Bit by bit, he's healing. That's all that matters.

It's how Eraserhead finds Tommy, sitting on the rooftop of a building as the stars shine down on him. Clara lays by his side, one of his calloused fingers tracing the nicks and dents in her form on the top. Tommy can feel the man's presence despite him not making a sound, so he leaps to his feet using Clara as a boost and moves to a different spot, just as a scarf shoots out right where he sat.

That was fucking rude. Not a "hello" or a "how are you doing?" Tommy silently sighs. What a wrongun'.

Nevertheless, he spins, narrowly missing another long-range attack near his torso. One towards his right arm, the second towards his calves, the third barely grazing his fingers. Eraserhead doesn't say a word, sending a barrage of precise, calculated hits with his scarf that Tommy pivots around. His hood would've fallen long ago had he not sewn the base of a cap with no brim inside the hood—thank Prime he cleaned that at Takoda.

This goes on for seemingly ages. Tommy holds Clara out in front of him in a balanced stance, breathing through his mouth lightly as he moves from another attack. Eraserhead's moves had slowed just a tad, though, probably contemplating something—at least, that's what Tommy thinks he's doing. The man's goggles are constantly peering directly at him. What else is he supposed to infer?

Tommy doesn't dare go in for close-combat, even if he wanted to. Izuku had ranted about him, once—about the man practically fighting Quirkless, and how he's his second favorite hero, and how he was "so cool! He stops a lotta trafficking that happens in the area! He's just—sorry, I'm repeating myself, but he's so cool with his ribbon-like scarf when he uses it to go all *fwoosh*! And he'd drag the villains over to him, and wrap the villains up within *seconds*, like with a *snap*!

"The scarf's probably a steel-wire alloy, because most of the villains I've seen him take down haven't been able to tear the scarf at *all*, and I'm sure there's something that lets him control the scarf however he pleases—maybe specialized nano-fibers? Nanomachines? Whatever it is, they'd have to be small to be interwoven in the scarf... Oh, maybe his *hair*, because it floats and stuff... wouldn't that mean he's able to control his hair, though? Hm..."

Prime, Tommy's not too surprised he's memorized this. He knows all of Izuku's All Might analysis rants because he's like a radio on fucking loop. Plus, that information was useful, as well as the memories from Tari's Coffee break-in—it's the reason he's been focused on *dodging* more so than attacking. If he were closer to Eraserhead, the man would pull him in and be able to move Tommy with his ribbons, meaning that he'd be trapped while the hero knocked him out and turned him in to the police.

Speaking of Eraserhead, he hasn't stopped attacking one bit, though they have slowed. And Tommy isn't sure if he's supposed to fall under the false tense that he's tiring out or something so that the man can get close to him either emotionally or physically to finally take him down. Regardless, Tommy's a *highly*-illegal vigilante who is probably assumed to be an adult by the media, and he doesn't really know the laws for vigilantes, so what would happen if they found out he's actually not eighteen (but still an adult, *not* a child), and that he literally has no records on their system or whatever all because Eraserhead gets him?

Tommy does *not* want to know. Like, at all.

He turns his head towards a random direction, instantly bolting towards the area when the chance arrives. It's sooner than he thought, the ribbon-like scarf's trajectory that shot out creating enough space and time for him to sprint out of there. He expertly uses Clara to dig into the brick walls and cracked stone of the surrounding buildings, leaping up onto a higher rooftop and being able to leap down without much qualms. Now, instead of panic, it feels like glee.

(Tommy isn't sure why Eraserhead isn't following him. He can't seem to bring himself care.)

Izuku comes to the apartment late with a blank gaze, a cast for his dominant hand, and his other arm bandaged. "I got a new scar," he says, shifting his arm cast, eyes dull, dull, dull, "and I messed up." And that's all Tommy needs.

He gives Izuku a few golden apple slices, entering the kitchen to cook something up. "Go wash," Tommy orders after he makes sure that Izuku eats the slices and his arms are relatively okay. "You fucking smell like shit." The jibe brings the tiniest tilt to Izuku's lips. "I'll put a movie up or something. Make some katsudon, too," the blond continues, halfheartedly grumbling the entire way.

(When Izuku spends so long in the shower that his hands are pruned and there are new bandages on his arms and his fingertips keep tracing a new pattern on both his arms, Tommy says nothing. When Tommy motions him to sit on the couch as a movie plays and he wordlessly melts into the cushions, arms wrapped around himself and eyes unfocused, katsudon barely touched, Tommy says nothing. When Izuku quietly laughs as Tommy practically rips the horrible movie a new one with his complaints and bitching, he revels in the quiet victory.)

When Izuku explains the day and gets to the hero-training part, soon falling asleep with exhaustion, Tommy makes some coffee and makes sure to stay with him when he writhes and wails in his sleep, and thinks that Toshinori isn't suited to teach.)

The third time he meets Eraserhead, it's in a dark alleyway at two in the morning.

Tommy is silent. He holds a dead man's hand, settling down on dirtied newspapers and rotting trash bags. A mouse scurries nearby.

The man he sits next to chuckles, brown hair and golden eyes barely visible in the dark. It's a quiet, hopeless, resigned thing. "I'm tired," he murmurs, voice ashy. It reeks of smoke.

Tommy clasps his hand tighter. He hopes his feelings of safety and moving on make it through.

The man smiles with missing and yellowed teeth. "You don't know my story," he says, "I am scum. You shouldn't comfort someone like me."

I am too, Tommy thinks. And we stick together.

"Thank you." The man closes his eyes.

Tommy doesn't let go until the other's breath stills.

He glances up. Eraserhead stands at the entrance of the pitiful alleyway. He does nothing when Tommy gets up and climbs away.

7:34

[Sent 1 Attachment]

<lovable cockroach> tommy please help how do i get past these reporters

<biggest man> Whta the fuckre they doing there

<lovable cockroach> they're probably here due to All Might ... n e way i don't want to go in there

<lovable cockroach> crowds are a bit too much for me ... [\[1\]](#)

<biggest man> Id say to fucking curse em out but

<biggest man> Honesty wiht how plain you look jsut duck your head n run

<biggest man> If they do apprach you say that your from a diferent class

<lovable cockroach> okay

<lovable cockroach> okay, yeah, i can do that

<lovable cockroach> thanks tommy ^^;

<biggest man> Np Big I

12:56

<lovable cockroach> tmyy

<lovable cockroach> tomy hlep

<lovable cockroach> cnt braethr

<lovable cockroach> mdia brkoe in nd ste larms

<lovable cockroach> cause d pnice n stuednts crowded whle tryngi to esape

<lovable cockroach> cant f focs

<lovable cockroach> ts lik e aldera

<biggest man> Can you call right now

<lovable cockroach> yse

<lovable cockroach> stlil in cafteris

<lovable cockroach> poeple re st aring

<lovable cockroach> ttmmy i dont wnat to b e hrut

<biggest man> Okay, I'll call you right now

"T-Tommy, Tommy *help* I—can't—they're *staring*—"

"Big Man I'm here I'm here, just... Fuck, okay, just listen to my voice, alright? Listen to me."

"Okay. O-Okay, I can do th—" A bout of ragged breaths, "That. I—"

"Hush. Alright, you'll be fucking fine, just—inhale for four seconds, alright? I'll count with you, just listen to me; One. Two. Three. Four. You're not in Aldera, alright? You're in U.A."

An unstable inhale. Murmurs and people can be heard shuffling about nearby. One voice distantly shouts, "Midoriya! Are you okay?"

"Just fucking ignore anyone else for now. Alright, now listen to me again: hold your breath for four. Okay? One. Two. Three. Four. You are not in Aldera. Think about something nice and cute or some shit."

Another voice, this one feminine, "Midoriya? Who are you talking to?"

A sharp inhale. "I-I—Tommy I don't—"

"*Ignore her.* Fucking focus on me. Just—close your eyes, alright? Now just steadily exhale for four. Alright? One. Two. Three. Four."

"...O—" A shaky exhale, "Okay."

"Let's do those again. Inhale—one. Two. Three. Four. Hold—one. Two. Three. Four. Exhale—one. Two. Three. Four."

A choppy inhale. A smoother exhale.

"Good. You're not in Aldera. You're in U.A. One more time. Inhale—one. Two. Three. Four. Hold—one. Two. Three. Four. Exhale—one. Two. Three. Four."

A gradually steadying inhale, and soon, a stable exhale.

"...Are you breathing regularly enough to be okay?"

"N-No. No, I think I'm not. I'm b-breathing okay, but..."

"Okay. Alright, I... You want me to stay on the line?"

"Y-Yes! I-I-I m-mean, yes, please."

"Alright. Tell me all about—what fucking hero were xe? Starburst?"

"Yeah, S-Starburst! Xe's the 'Shooting Star' hero! Xe's heavily renowned for being deeply associated with LGBTQIA+ community, constantly d-donating money from xyr hero work to charities like the Trevor Project and the National Suicide Hotline due to xyr own experiences! Xe's a great influence in modern society, xyr hero rank up to number forty-eight due to their reputation on the LGBTQIA+ community *and* their battle prowess on the field, which is pretty cool..."

"I'm glad to see you alright, Midoriya!"

"Me too! We were all so worried when you were getting your phone out and hyperventilating... Aizawa sent us to check on you after you went to Recovery Girl and collapsed on the bed."

"T-Thank you, Iida, Uraraka."

"...Hey, Midoriya, who was that you were on the phone with?"

"A-Ah, uh... Just a friend of mine. He's helped me through a lot."

"Uraraka! We shouldn't pry into Midoriya's personal life! Although I am concerned just as much as you, as well as the rest of the class, it isn't our business!"

"N-No, it's fine, Iida! I... His name's T-Tommy. He's helped me through some tough times, and I couldn't be more grateful for him."

"Oooh! 'Tommy'... Is he from America?"

"I—"

"Ah—sorry, I'm probably going to start prying too much. Sorry, sorry... Lets just go back to class, okay?"

"Dusk."

Tommy glances up from where he sits on another rooftop, recognizing the voice and tensing. And lo and behold, there Eraserhead stands. For what, the third time this week? It's pretty weird that he's actually here and not somewhere else. Did he shift his patrol route or something?

But, fuck. The man came at the worst time possible for him. Tommy can't do shit right now—his hands and mouth are occupied with bandages, tugging them tighter and tighter around his arms. The older, dirtied bandages sit in his lap. His vambraces lay on the ground nearby, and he prays that Eraserhead doesn't destroy them. The bandages had come loose during a close fight, and Tommy's skin and scars prickled and itched and Prime he just wanted to tear it all off.



Regardless, Eraserhead's going to fight him. The man's already raising his hands, so Tommy closes his eyes, lifts his forearms, braces himself and—

Can you understand this? Eraserhead signs after Tommy opens his eyes to see why there's no impact. Do you know sign language?

What.

...What?

Tommy... reluctantly nods. There's no harm in doing so. Does he want information or some shit?

If you want information on some organization, I don't have any, Tommy responds after slightly lowering his arms and releasing his newer bandages, shaking his head. Are you going to arrest me now?

Eraserhead frowns. He hesitates, before gesturing, Your arms. What happened?

Oh, *shit*.

Tommy picks his bandages back up and hastens the wrapping process, squeezing as tight as he can and quickly tying the ends into a knot. Then he sloppily does the same to his other arm, the dressing significantly looser than his other arm. He shoves his hoodie sleeves down, making sure they cover his arms up to the end of his wrist.

He can't explain this. He...

He darts off the rooftop and onto another and another, narrowly avoiding the hero's quiet curses and beckons as the man chases him throughout the area.

(When Aizawa asks what's under his bandages on his arms in the safety of Tari's Coffee as Tommy yawns the next day, he scowls and says to "mind your own business, bitch."

He finds the man staring at his arms more with a frown. Tommy prays he doesn't find a connection.)

Chapter End Notes

1. people surrounding him usually remind izuku of the toxic environment back in aldera. he just imagines people laughing are jeering and cheering katsuki on as he hurts izuku n shit and it just,,,, yeah. or, it could just be the general anxiety of crowding or being surrounded. [\[return to text\]](#)

hahahahaha, sorry for the rushed ending,,,,,,,,,,,,,

edited mar. 10 2023 10:05

two steps back.

Chapter Summary

„uh oh

Chapter Notes

fanart in this chapter is byyyyy @Si_Wolfie on wattpad !!! :DDDDD (though, he has his eyepatch on at all times during this chapter)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Today is going to be shit; Tommy knows it is.

He's felt like shit every since he woke up at three. There's a cold, icy feeling settling in his gut about something wrong, hurting to the point where it's permeating his every thought and *clearly* his actions, too, because he can't stop pacing and he wants to but he *can't*. Because here's the fucking thing: Tommy doesn't even know why he's feeling this. So there's just a bad feeling in his gut about seemingly nothing at all or everything, and he fucking hates it because his gut is never wrong.

What will happen on patrol? What will happen in the cafe? What will happen to this home-like apartment? What will happen to Takoda? What will happen to the people? *What will happen to Izuku and Inko?*

Prime, Tommy should've known his luck was going to fuck him over. It's been months with this good streak, and now reality's going to crash over him and this is not a dream. This is not all happiness and joy, this is fucking reality.

(He's Tommy Innit "Theseus" Craft, the boy who breaks all he touches.)

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, *fuck*.

There's no brewing stands. No potions he can give, no ingredients he can get, and he doesn't have obsidian for blaze powder or any Nether ingredients. There's not enough time to get Netherite, and he can't stand lava or explosions so it'd be useless to try regardless. Fuck, he's not able to get diamonds, either—a full set would take at least half a day to get, and that's if he's lucky. Izuku would have to be awake, too, to even get to his mineshaft. Iron armor would be his best shot, which, fortunately, he has enough ingots for maybe three sets. But, fuck, not only does he not have enough for everyone he holds dear—in this world, where shit like metal manipulation can exist, it's *flimsy*.

Fuck. Alright; iron armor is his only choice. At least it's *something*.

Tommy opens a chest with one hand, taking out a stack and some more of iron and feeling his body weigh heavier with them in his inventory. His other hand taps his crafting table, already taking out

chest-plates, leggings, boots, and helmets. Twenty four ingots for each set of full armor, and Tommy has garnered seventy-nine ingots, just enough for three sets of armor and some weapons.

No, he has four sets of armor, actually. He'll equip his vigilante armor set underneath his uniform at Tari's. Eight swords or two axes... No, wait, perhaps he could make iron bars and snap those into rods? But no one knows how to use them... Shit.

At least it's something; Tommy will make some just in case, his hands already slotting six ingots in their places, putting the extra ingot back in a chest, his fingers shaking as he replaces the ingots with sixteen iron bars. Inko has telekinesis, she'll be able to use knives and throw them. Or a blunt object to knock an intruder or ten out. She'll need a set of armor for either today or in the future. Izuku... Golden apple slices for OFA, one of the sets of armor. He can't exactly bring these staffs to Tari's Coffee for public use, but Tommy will keep them on him. He'll hold the extra set, too, only if his vigilante set breaks.

Shit, maybe Izuku needs them.

...Okay, the extra set for Izuku, then.

Tommy sets his forehead on a chest, closes his eyes, and feels his paranoia of something *wrong* ring in his head. This isn't enough to soothe him—no, no even *close*—but he'll make it so.

It has to be.

Izuku heads off to U.A. with five golden apple slices, wearing specialized iron armor underneath his uniform with the extra set in his backpack, and a tease that Tommy's being overprotective—that nothing bad will happen. After all, it's only the third day of the school year, and U.A. has one of the best security systems. (As if the infiltration just a day prior showed that.)

Tommy's gut twists as he watches him go. He prays Izuku's right.

13:03

<small hellion> tommy!! we're going to the usj today !!!

<big hellion> Usj? Univresal Studio of Japan?

<small hellion> ah, no, this one stands for unforeseen stimulation joint

<small hellion> apparently we're going to be taught by three teachers instead of two like originally planned? not sure whar that's abt...

<small hellion> i think it'll be fun !! (◡‿◡)

<big hellion> You suer youll be s afe, Big Man?

<small hellion> i am !!! like i said, three teachers instead of two today. u.a.'s teachers are all pro heroes !

<big hellion> But

<big hellion> Do you have your iron armor o

<big hellion> n?

<small hellion> i do, i do. don't worry, alrighfjcjdjdjssssssss

<big hellion> Izuku????

<small hellion> WHO THE FSBDBX UCK AR E YHCBDOCH Uzzz

<small hellion> z Hello Midd fgfhrv iyss

<small hellion> frin ned dddd

<big hellion> Izuku??????

<small hellion> dddffffff

<small hellion> liiiiizsrjrhfjerjrrrrr

<small hellion> IM BACK

<small hellion> IM ALIVW TOMMY DW

<small hellion> my classmates stole my phone because i was smiling at it (●◡◡)ゞ

<big hellion> Oh thank Prime youre safe

<small hellion> sorry for any panic ,,,,,,

<big hellion> Who was the frist perosn?

<small hellion> ah

<small hellion> you won't like my answer

<big hellion> Say it im nto a pussy

<big hellion> Unlike Someone

<big hellion> /j

<small hellion> hey! >:((/nm

<small hellion> anyways, it was kac

<small hellion> bakugo.

<big hellion> Oh

<big hellion> Him.

<big hellion> Wait he got into U.SA's hero course

<small hellion> apparently, yeah

<small hellion> of course he'd make it though

<big hellion> Ahut the fuck up

<big hellion> He dosent deserve to be in the hero ccourse

<small hellion> you've told me that too many times

<small hellion> however, even schools like u.a. may have favoritism for strong quirks ...

<big hellion> Bu

<small hellion> ANYWAYS

<big hellion> How did you cut me off mid text

<small hellion> we're almost at the usj

<big hellion> Youre avoiding the fuckin question

<small hellion> WAIT TSU JUST ALMOST RVEEKALED OFFA WITH HER OVSERVATIONS I

<big hellion> Izuku youre a

<small hellion> GOTTA CLEAR THIS UP RN

<big hellion> Yo uare a right bitch thats what yku aee

<small hellion> hypocrite /j

<big hellion> I

<small hellion> tttyl !!!

<big hellion> GRT VACK JWRW

13:37

<big hellion> BTICH

<big hellion> MI NOT LEYYYIBG YOU GET AEAY EITH THIS

14:09

<big hellion> IZUUK

15:24

<big hellion> IZUKU ANSWHR ME YOY FUCK

Incoming Call From
big hellion

...

"H-Hi! You've, uh, reached my voicemail. I-I'm probably b-busy at the moment—just leave a message here and I'll r-respond as soon as I can!" The speaker picks up a few shuffles, *"Bye!—"*

17:45

<big hellion> Izuku

<big hellion> You fucikgn wanker this idnt funny snymore

Incoming Call From
big hellion

...

"H-Hi! You've, uh, reached my voicemail. I-I'm probably b-busy at the moment—just leave a message here and I'll—"

Incoming Call From
big hellion

...

"H-Hi! You've, uh, reached my voicemail. I-I'm probably b-busy at the moment—just—"

Incoming Call From
big hellion

...

"H-Hi! You've, uh—"

Eraserhead doesn't come to the shop at his usual time.

Tommy bites his lip, pulls a smile and trudges on. The armor under his sleeves is uncomfortably warm.

An extra large serving of dark coffee goes hidden and untouched.

18:37

<big hellion> ...Izuku?

19:06

<small hellion> TOMMY

Incoming Call From
big hellion

...

"Tommy!" Izuku's voice is hushed. There's the shuffling of fabrics and the lowered voices of students in the background. But honestly? They could go fuck themselves. "Tommy, I—"

"Izuku," Tommy breathes, settling himself on the mattress of his bed, "Fuck you."

"Wh—"

"Fuck you so much." Tommy chokes, his grip on his communicator wobbling, "You fucker, you fucking bitch you—I'm—fuck you, I'm going to *kill* you when you get back, fuck you, I—"

Izuku laughs. There's an undertone of true terror that lines his voice, a wobble that betrays it further. "Y-Yeah, I..."

"No; shut up, alright? Fuck you, man, just. Fucking shit, I knew it, I said there'd be something bad happening but 'no!'" Tommy imitates a Prime-awful impression of Izuku's voice but he doesn't fucking *care*, "No! Meh meh meh meh I'm Iz—Midoriya fuckin' *Izuku* and I think that Tommy is a fucking *wrongun*' and that he's being overprotective and—and I'm gonna *prank* him and m-make 'im all *panicky* and—and—" He trails off into stutters.

"I know," Izuku whispers. "I. I know, but Tommy—*villains attacked*. A-An entire *invasion* of *actual villains* who w-wouldn't hesitate to kill us. S-Some of us a-almost. Almost *died*. My homeroom teacher—*E-Eraserhead* almost d-died."

Shit.

The next sentence Izuku says makes Tommy's ears ring. "There was a thing—a Nomu, the leader called it—that. That All Might had to... to '*go beyond*' to defeat." It comes out like a whimper.

Tommy freezes. "Fuck," he haltingly exhales, "fuck, fuck, *fuck*—did anything help him? T-The apple slices or the *armor* or—"

"T-They did!" He knows Izuku's trying to rush the topic, "They did. A lot. T-The leader had a disintegration Quirk—" *What?* "—so if he touched me the armor would've blocked it. A-And the Nomu... Eraserhead i-isn't in g-good... c-conditions, though he w-would've been in worse ones had I not s-saved the apples. Same for t-the other teacher, Th-Thirteen. I-I'm—we're all s-stable and I'm fine, by the way!"

"Alright—Alright, that's... okay."

"...idoriya?" A voice calls, barely picked up by the speaker, "...lking...secc...is it...mmy?"

"Ah—sorry Tommy," Izuku murmurs, "g-give me a moment."

Something covers up the speaker, and as a muffled conversation ensues, Tommy plans.

The armor helped. Iron is flimsy, so Tommy will go to the mineshaft and mine for diamonds to create better armor. Maybe Netherite, if he can stomach getting it.

He'll make the apples a highly-concentrated juice (or try to) for Toshinori, and put them in two vials—one for the hero, one for Izuku. The green haired teen doesn't know how to wield a sword so Tommy will have to show him. Daggers, maybe, and a bow for long distance—or, if too far, a fishing rod. No crossbow.

And then, there's the added trauma.

Fuck. The *trauma*.

Not now. Later. That shit's for future him.

Just. Tommy needs context, so fucking much of it, and he needs to know what to *do*. Izuku will dig into himself like a miner with a pickaxe and a rich cave, telling himself he could've been *stronger* or *better* in situations like these, and Tommy doesn't even know most of the details, just the important ones. Tommy's seventeen, he can (maybe) handle this shit—Izuku is fucking *fifteen*.

Tommy can't let this shit repeat. Can't let something like *himself* repeat.

"I-I'm back," Izuku says. "E-Everyone wants to m-meet you." Tommy inhales.

He can handle this shit. Just, not now. Tommy has to prepare so many fucking things.

"Tell them to fuck off," he says, getting up. Where did he put his pickaxe, again? "Come back soon, dickhead."

He ends the call before Izuku can say anything.

Izuku comes home and immediately cries in Tommy's arms, clawing at his back. Inko's at work, but he's not the one who's telling her shit. "Tommy, Tommy, Tommy," he whispers through choking sobs, curling into himself, "I'm s-sorry, I-I'm sorry, I-I'm sorr-y." Bandages—freshly wrapped—wound around his arms, and the older teen can see the edges of more under Izuku's pant legs. He wails in the crook of his neck and Tommy can't do more than close the front door and try to comfort him, tears staining his trademark t-shirt.

Tommy gets a glimpse at Izuku's face and almost recoils at how much he looks like him. How he stands less a child and more a soldier, how he has a haunted look in his eyes, and how he's still tense. Prime, he's still fucking *scared*.

("Back straight, weapons at your side," Gener—Wilbur orders, face painfully stotic, "and do not ever let your guard down. Shoulders, neck and head up. Look confident. Do not stand down.")

Tommy shoves a golden apple slice in his mouth. Izuku doesn't think twice when biting down, no hesitation in his jaw or eyes. Fucking hell, Izuku even sighs when the steam rolls from his pores. He's not supposed to get used to constant regeneration. No one is.

...Though, he understands. Tommy passes a fresh bowl of katsudon and explains his plan for the concentrated golden apple vials as Izuku eats like a starved man.

Inko does not—*will not* know about Izuku's nightmares.

The next fortnight is spent in long, claustrophobic strip-mines, hearing the crazed scribbles of a leader drowning in insanity, remembering the path to his mineshaft, helping Izuku survive, and filling chests with armor and ore. Izuku helps him to get to the mineshaft at five in the morning and stays there until Tommy leaves which... he doesn't leave until he feels like he can't handle the walls of his strip-mines anymore, is out of food, is about to pass out, or needs to go to the bathroom.

Regardless, when he leaves the mines, Izuku is not far behind wherever Tommy goes. He's worryingly silent, not even responding with a noise when Tommy asks for directions to the mineshaft again. Doesn't talk about heroes or the constant news lines about the USJ or even about Tommy's "Quirk" much.

Tommy gets it. And Inko does, too, though never as much as they do. (Tommy ignores the quiet weeps across the wall that are the epitome of *why-can-i-not-do-more* and *i-am-sorry-sorry-sorry*, and soothes a writhing, sleeping Izuku.)

(DUSK GOES MIA, the headlines scream, WHERE ARE THEY, AND WHAT WILL THEIR NEXT MOVE BE?)

Tommy grunts, ripping out some diamonds with the end of his pickax. They clink onto the stone ground, echoing over a blocked lava pool that took him ten minutes to even get close to. Tommy shivers, picking the priceless gems up and weighing them in his palms. Three of them, making his total two stacks. This world is fucking loaded.

Izuku quietly awes at them with large eyes when Tommy holds the gems to him. This is the first time he's been in the mines Tommy's made, as he was only allowed to go in after Tommy had made him more armor. He sets the valuable gems in the other's hands and goes to continue mining, Izuku still gaping at the gems in his palms. The sides glisten under torchlight, a mix of rough and soft combined with light orange highlights and tints of yellow and blue.

"This..." Tommy hears Izuku move forward in tandem with him. "These are diamonds? They're so pretty...!"

"Yeah, Big Man," Tommy says, digging up some coal—and oh, soon after, some gold. He hadn't expected that. "Real diamonds 'n' shit. Don't sell them though—I'm collecting those to make armor."

He turns to see Izuku nodding, murmuring, "I won't! ...How do you make armor from these, anyway? On the Mohs Scale, this is the toughest gem known to man."

...The fuck's a *Mohs Scale*?

Nevertheless, Tommy takes out a stick, coats it with the coal he just got and strikes it on the floor. It bursts to life as Tommy forces a quick crevice into the wall and shoves the freshly-instigated torch into it. "Big Imbecile—" An indignant yet quiet cry rings out. Tommy pointedly ignores it, "—if I couldn't make it into armor I wouldn't have mined it. It's a part of my—Quirk." Still getting used to the Quirk shit.

"Really?!" Izuku runs by his side with the little hop hop hop of his feet tapping the ground, and Tommy wants to bounce with him in utter joy. "Like the crafting table? Do you make armor with that?"

"Ye—" Tommy swings, digging up some iron with a grunt, "Yeah."

"How does that work?" Izuku's voice steadily rises, "Can you see how the diamonds are merged to make armor? Ooooooh do you just meld it together with the glowy thing your fingers were doing? Wait, wait—how do you make wea—tools, then? Like how do you make the pickaxes or the shovel or the bucket or..."

Tommy picks up the iron with the smallest smile on his face and lets him rant.



Inko moves into his line of vision and sets a hand on his cheek when she sees Tommy up and making coffee for the nth time that week, dulled iron pickaxe in hand at four in the morning. She frowns at the flinch he makes, something pitying in her gaze, and Tommy fucking *hates it*.

"Don't overwork yourself, alright?" Inko asks.

"Yes ma'am," Tommy lies, before downing another cup, going out the door, and following a path to a mineshaft he shouldn't need to memorize but already has by heart.

On the second week of temporary leave, Tommy brings Izuku outside to Takoda after a particularly bad nightmare. Izuku fidgets with a closed glass vial filled with golden apple juice, the gold reflecting in the moonlight. There's heavy bags under both of their eyes.

"Alright, Big Man," Tommy says, pointing a wooden, dulled tip of a sword imitation towards Izuku's chest. He tosses another one to Izuku's feet. "I'll show you how to wield some fucking weapons this week." Izuku immediately picks up the blunt blade with newfound determination.

"Running forward. Duck, try to swing off-balance with blade—he jumped before impact, so high-kick when he comes near and adjust grip—"

"Don't mumble your plans out, you fucking dumbass!" Tommy meets his blade with Izuku's before that high kick can happen, the resounding thud of wood against wood loud. "Why the fuck does every hero and villain do that anyway? Wouldn't it—shit!" Izuku retaliates his blow, Tommy jumps back, "Be better to keep moves hidden by—" Another resounding blow pierces the air as Tommy knocks Izuku into the ground, the tip of his blade pointed at the other's neck, "*not* saying them?"

Izuku gulps, holding his hands up as a universal sign of defeat. "Y-Yeah, it would, sorry."

Tommy huffs, setting his sword aside and helping Izuku up while dusting off any sand. "You're getting better at defense. Footwork needs a bit more, as well as reflexes, but we can work on that shit over time. By normal standards you'd be considered a natural, though—it's only been three days. Once you get a grip on swords we can move on to adding a fishing rod, bows, and other weapons to add to your style."

That gets a quiet groan from Izuku. "But—"

"You'd ask for it anyways, I'm just saving the fucking trouble." Tommy continues, "Let me see your stance again."

Tommy passes out on the counter of Tari's Coffee one shift. He wakes covered in a random, unfamiliar blanket, a pillow underneath his crossed arms, customers concernedly surrounding him, a demand to take a break for the month, and a cup of warm tea shoved in his hands.

He reluctantly complies. He promised to not be Wilbur, after all.

"You got the armor?" Tommy pushes, "And the vial? And your staff?"

Izuku nods, "I do. T-Triple checked my bag."

"Good. Alright, uh—call me or try an' tell me when shit goes down for you, alright? Like panic attacks, breakdowns, whatever the fuck."

"I-I will!"

Two weeks have already been over. The amount of time given for students and teachers alike to recover is fucking shitty. Give them a month, at *least*—most of them almost saw their teacher *die* Prime damn it.

(Though, he can't deny the strike of happiness that overcame him when Eraserhead walked into the cafe looking like a mummy and saying his usual hello the day before. Tommy barely contained his laugh when he put the two already-made black coffee's on the counter and watched the hero snatch them off, even with all the bandages. He'd opened one and started gulping like a *starved madman*.)

Tommy huffs, turning to Inko who's about to go to work. "Have I gone over everything?"

The woman puts a hand to her cheek. "Yes, I think so. You've talked about the vial and armor, as well as water, his bento, bandages, a med-kit..."

"O-Okay!" Izuku exclaims, walking towards the open door. "I g-gotta go n-now before I'm late!"

"Wait!" Tommy rushes, feeling his anxiousness spike, "Just—fucking stay *safe*, alright?" There's no cold feeling in his gut, but Tommy can't afford to relax. It's never safe, even here. He still has to get diamonds and shit, something infinitely easier due to the surprising lack of mobs underground.

Izuku gives a shaky smile, "I-I'll tr—no, I will!"

Tommy feels his chest get lighter as he watches the other run out. "You better fucking be, wanker."

Chapter End Notes

edited mar 10 2023 10:49

—through fractured, timeworn glasses.

Chapter Summary

IZUKU POV IZUKU POV IZUKU POV IZ—

Chapter Notes

ik i already warned yall abt the content warnings but this one,,,,,, has a lot,,,,,, in the beginning. izu's mind is just. a really dark place for a bit. 'm not sure how to describe any tws 'cause i'm stupid, but 'm absolutely positive that there's at *least* some **suicidal thoughts/ideation** ahead, as well as a bout of **dissociation**, so please be cautious.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Perseverance is an exhausting thing.

It's when someone can't focus but gets through regardless, because time and life wait for no man. It's when someone works so hard only to find it's for naught when the project is almost done, yet they keep pushing to go off with a bang and not a whisper. It's when someone goes and fights and fights only for their efforts to be laughed at, but they keep going to try and be that one ripple in a lake that changes thousands of rivers and streams for the better.

It's when someone has no motivation to move, but they need to keep going to survive, to live on until everything is better and accept no less or else they will *explode*.

Izuku thinks that he's running out of it; perseverance. His determination was snuffed out years ago, now embers of what could've been.

There's less of a reason to get up each and every day that passes so agonizingly slow. He has no friends so he has no choice but to watch hero video after hero video, analyzing and analyzing so that his mind keeps turning and turning and forgets his cold loneliness, even for a little. The pain from his injuries doesn't help when hiding from Kacchan, especially getting up, because he's started thinking, *does* he want to do this again? He constantly works for the neighbors, all who accept his requests being elders, for bits of money that all go into bandages and burn cream.

He doesn't want to break the "good, self-sustaining child" facade he wears around his mom because she works so much and supports him and god, he's already too much of a burden. School takes up most of the time he has and yet Izuku learns nothing because he already knows the information, his yearning mind constantly starving for knowledge even at home, enough for him to keep studying (but that's a lie, isn't it? He just doesn't want to think about the wrappings that cover his skin and the burn salve just underneath.) He needs to go to school to get a job—a *real one*—anyhow, yet he doubts with his Quirklessness he'll ever get one.

Even his hope for *heroes* is wavering—because why is there no hero saving *him*? Why does Izuku have to be his own hero? Why does he have to pull his own bandages, to cover his arms in burn salve, to calm himself down from every panic attack he gets? He's told the teachers, he's told other adults. He's told everyone he could like those stupid presentations on bullying and the heroes on the forums and news said, and look where that got him! *Nowhere!*

(This is almost *torture*, blood dripping in steady rivulets from his mind. Izuku is surrounded by people, people he watches interact with one another, giving gifts and hugs and playful noogies and compliments and kindness and love, love, *love*, yet his heart *aches* because he's so alone. He knows his mother tries her best and it's hard but he's been sucking this up for eleven years and he's so *tired*.)

(...He almost thinks that he's just spewing excuses, sometimes. Izuku's had more privileges than other quirkless people, after all. At least some education, a mother, a residence to call *home*—he shouldn't be so greedy.)

(God, he's so tired.)

...Is it worth it?

No. No, no, no. It is, it *is* worth it, he just—has to wait for something—for *someone*—to help him.

Izuku has to hope. Izuku *has* to persevere. If not, he will break at the seams and fall apart.

"If you think you'll have a Quirk in your next life, go take a swan dive off the roof!"

Izuku stares at his ex-best friend's retreating form, envisions the layers and layers of starburst scars that litter his own, scrawny form underneath his uniform and mutters, "Maybe I will."

(He almost misses the near-frantic whip of Kacchan's head just by the doorway, busing himself with his backpack with dull, dull eyes. Izuku's probably going delusional anyway.)

(Izuku does not, in the end, jump off. He's too much of a coward to do so, instead walking back home with a charred notebook in his grasp after a moment of consideration, and isn't that just so selfish, so *pathetic* of him?)

...A piece of himself stays in that moment and doesn't return.

He trudges on.)

Izuku flips through the pages of notebook thirteen, lightly tugging on its burnt edges and watching thin ash break off in its wake. He softly exhales, closing the book with a snap that speaks finality. He swings his backpack over his shoulder in front of him to gently put it away.

Izuku's fingers graze the sleeves of his uniform over and over once he shifts his backpack back. He traces the scars left by explosion after explosion, places where he knows there's curves that end with sharp apex's, burning even now, and he closes his eyes to savor the phantom feeling.

I am okay, Izuku thinks, weaving through the city with ease. *I am okay*, he thinks, glancing at hero fights and so forlornly and gazing at his backpack. *I am okay*, he thinks, watching the clouds drift by as he steps into a tunnel.

He is okay.

(If he isn't—and only if, because Izuku is okay—everything will crumble.)

Izuku thinks, watching a shadow loom over him, hearing and practically feeling the sickening pulling and shifting and squishing of something akin to sludge, that he should want to run. He should want to sprint off like he always has, from whatever *this* is—not Kacchan nor his lackeys, as no one has a slime-related quirk in Aldera.

A villain. This is a *villain*.

(...The realization isn't as chilling as he thought.)

He does not act on his fears and instincts, in the end. Because between one moment and the next, Izuku is choking.

It doesn't feel as different as Kacchan's chokeholds, or the suffocating tension at after-school hours. Doesn't feel different compared to the bandages that are a smoldering presence underneath his school uniform collar. But the sludge stuffed down his throat, tearing through him and filling his lungs, tears springing to his eyes, *killing him*—

(And, well, thoughts can be as fast as a twentieth of a second—well enough time for Izuku to *think* about it. Ponder his dilemma, his situation, rolling and stretching it until he comes to one single conclusion:

He does not mind dying.

He can't do it by his own hands because he's a coward. But if he were to die by someone else's, then he wouldn't care as much as he should.

Because in this world, Izuku is a blip of gray in a miasma of colors. He is an outdated set of newspapers, printed in black-and-white with people in bygone clothing utilizing old technology compared to all the others. He is a piece of a useless past, lined with rigged edges and irregular shapes in the glorious, "perfect" puzzle that is society. He is the rough stones and pebbles beneath one's feet, made to lift the superior ones higher.

No one besides his mom would care if he's gone.

That, and Izuku is tired. He's had to survive since eleven years ago—let him live, please.)

Izuku forces himself to relax. Keep calm. His body goes slack bit by bit, either from the sludge that suffocates him or by his own will. Nevertheless, the villain smiles in delight. It says something, but Izuku is drowning and he can't hear it. He takes a glimpse at his sketch of a hero costume never meant to be and wants to rip it to shreds.

At least his death'll be somewhat painless.

And then, All Might is there.

Izuku is motionless on a rooftop as his idol—now a dying man who shoulders too much expectations on his shoulders—shatters his dreams and leaves without consequence.

he doesn't comprehend much, his mind foggy.

he leaves the rooftop after looking down at the cars and leaning over the edge and contemplative what-ifs.

izuku's shoes squeak as he goes down the stairwell.

he thinks, distantly, of going to see a hero fight.

Izuku smells smoke, something so familiar that he almost doesn't smell it. He looks up, and his body runs before his mind does.

There's a vigilante literally beating the sludge villain single-handedly as *actual pro heroes* stand on the side, and Izuku can't help but stare in pure *awe*. His dirty, scratched hands that grip his bully's arm falter on one of his tugs, his chipped nails breaking out into jabs of pain, but to Izuku, the pain is nothing. His fascination overwhelms it, really, as he stares at that masked vigilante.

The vigilante—Dusk, a recent one in the city that uses he and him—wields his baton and himself like he has a sword, Izuku notes. He makes hesitating moves that would've led to a piercing blade driving itself in the sludge, slight faults in his stance due to weight imbalance—the only reason Izuku picks these small indicators up is because he spends his day-to-day life observing. And that he's studied heroes and villains who use swords before, of course. But either way, it's still a peculiar thing.

Yet this doesn't take away how Dusk practically dances on the battlefield. Yes, his movements are feral, but the vigilante weaves himself through the debris and fire like a dancer pivots on-stage, always targeting the villain's eyes without falter. His style is both a mix of barbaric and smooth—a dangerous mix because it's unpredictable. One moment Dusk could swing with grace, the next he's crouched on almost all fours and using his body and baton in tandem.

But some heroes do that. Some heroes fight just like Dusk. The more animalistic ones are swift yet wild with their attacks, and others fight with elegance and strategy. So what makes this vigilante so different?

Izuku wrenches Kacchan's arms further out once, twice, and everything clicks.

Dusk isn't using a Quirk. There is *no* indication of that.

If he had super strength, he wouldn't use a baton. If Dusk had agility, then the villain would be down already because he'd be faster than it and would've taken its eyes. If the vigilante had any sort of solidification, then he wouldn't be deflecting debris with a baton. If he had a manipulation quirk, why isn't he using it? And yes, maybe he has a Quirk, but it may be so minuscule that it's useless.

So Dusk fights Quirkless.

Dusk *fights Quirkless*.

Izuku feels like he's gained strength as he pulls and pulls and *pulls*, so much so that he doesn't even need the extra support Dusk gives nearby.

When Izuku can finally leave the area of the Sludge Incident, Dusk isn't there. Of course, as a vigilante he had to leave in order to not get arrested, but—*man*. He wanted an autograph.

(...Is vigilantism illegal if no quirk is used?

That single question takes his mind down a thorough yet wavering trail of what-ifs and possibilities and theories, of chances and rising confidence and—

—and no. No. Maybe in some other universe Izuku takes this chance in his hands and makes it his, but this isn't the one. He sets this germinating seed down and shoves it deep, deep into the chambers of his mind [but does not lock it like the rest.]

Regardless, Izuku walks with a pep in his step, even when Kacchan confronts him and, right after, All Might asks for forgiveness and reveals One for All.

When Izuku sees someone on Takoda roaming it with familiarity, his mind does a double take. Did they live here? When did someone live here? Why did someone live here? Did they not have an apartment or home?

The stranger wore a white t-shirt with red sleeves, along with long denim pants that were cut in some places. There's bandages that line their revealed arms, making the only visible skin his hands and face. Really, even their *face* is covered partially, a deep blue eye-patch with gold accents and embroidery on their right eye, complimenting their left eye, that being a sapphire blue. It's like Dusk's, in a way—though, that's probably a stretch of a theory.

Regardless, with the ropes looped around Izuku's shoulders and how he's pulling the number one hero on a fridge, this was... definitely *not* a good time to start training. At all. Yeah, not a good first-impression. Izuku can feel his face burn as he explains to the stranger why he and Yagi were here.

When Yagi confirms that yes, he is training Izuku, the stranger... doesn't react how others normally would. They don't say anything about being so lucky, nor do they congratulate Izuku, nor do they bombard them with questions.

There's a sort of darkness that overshadows their eye, their pupil shrinking while they stare at the number one hero. Normally, people would be excited in said hero's presence, but now that Izuku looks closer, this person... they aren't excited, or even relatively happy. Really, they're *tense*, sort of... eyeing Yagi down? Their hand is twitching for something, too, their expression dull and guarded.

No, they don't look joyful at all.

...Or *maybe*, Izuku is being too analytical like usual.

Regardless, the stranger keeps glancing between Yagi and Izuku, so he stays as still as possible, trying not to fiddle around. Of course, he fails spectacularly, but at least he tried.

Finally, after heavily tense beats that felt like eternity, the stranger runs a hand through their hair and inhales, exhaling a few moments after. "What will you do," they practically spit, and Izuku blinks, surprised at the venom in his tone. Yagi, on the other hand, balks.

"...Aren't you supposed to ask why I'm—"

"What will you do."

"Well," Yagi pauses. The stranger gets into a stance, and wow, okay, there is definitely something underlying that little movement. Yagi reluctantly explains, "I was planning to have Young Midoriya here follow a training regimen—my *Aim to Pass: American Dream Plan*. As he follows it, he'll also

clean up all the trash on this shore. It should be enough for him to be prepared for U.A.'s exams in ten months."

The stranger doesn't back down until they seem to come to a decision. When they do, their shoulders relax not by a lot, and his hand twitches less. Then, they sigh. "You can stay here," they say, which is pretty surprising. "Do training an' shit, I don't really care. I'm Tommy, I use he and him pronouns, and I'm not an American."

Alright, a name! It's something from another country, but luckily, it isn't hard to pronounce! Great!

Izuku beams. "R-Really? Thank you so much!" Wait, wait, he should've introduced himself what is he *doing*—"Oh, right! Even though A-All Might already said it, my n-name is Midoriya—Midoriya I-Izuku!"

The stranger—*Tommy*. Tommy nods, pointing somewhere ahead. "Go over there on that side," he instructs, turning to the opposite side. "This side's mine."

"Thank you, Young Tommy," All Might exclaims as he hops off the fridge, "Come on, Young Midoriya!"

Izuku studies Tommy just a bit longer. He still doesn't look relaxed—if Izuku had to compare Tommy to something, he'd be like a mouse trap, waiting to snap.

Speaking of which, Izuku snaps out of his thoughts. "R-Right!"

He'll worry about Tommy later.

Or maybe, right *now*.

Every time the beach-dweller—Tommy, he has to get used to that—suddenly hisses, Izuku startles and drops whatever he's holding. Tommy's also sort of taken a post on a nearby appliance, waiting for something. Probably. What he's waiting for, Izuku almost has no idea. If he had to guess, it's for when Yagi does something Tommy doesn't like.

Specifically when the hero is even *near* Izuku. He literally leans forward and *snarls*, forcing Yagi to back away.

It's just, Tommy's so quiet for most of the time. So much so, that when Izuku notices him in his peripheral vision, he kind of just realizes Tommy's there all over again. And when he just suddenly snarls like a warning and says to back off? It scares not only Yagi, but Izuku, too.

Has Tommy internally promised to be Izuku's shield from All Might? Oh, wow, if that's true then it implies a *lot*. Who hurt him? Heroes? If so, why did *heroes* hurt him? Or does All Might look like someone who hurt Tommy?

There's so much packed in these little movements, it scares him.

When he finally gains the courage to ask why Tommy does that thing and he responds with, "I'm making sure he doesn't do shit to you," Izuku doesn't know what to think.

Tommy isn't surprised when All Might accidentally switches to his true form. It both surprises Izuku, and doesn't. Now that he thinks about it, Tommy's a paradox he'll probably never understand completely. Like a Rubik's cube mixed a thousand times over by different people.

Nevertheless, Izuku still stammers out, "Y-You. You aren't gonna question it?"

"I thought something was a bit wriggly with that," Tommy responds as if it's *obvious*, and wow. Most people don't even notice. Maybe they're all unobservant. "Just didn't wanna ask. Privacy, sore spots, insecurities—that shit."

When he then goes on to provide a reasonable explanation, Izuku just gapes. It's not the truth—no, not even close—but it's. It's *something*. How did he deduce *that* when All Might's so good at hiding his injury the *media* doesn't notice? Like yes, Izuku had noticed a little limp there, or maybe a few times wherein the hero has favored his left side, but it's still... amazing. For someone to notice in just a month or so when it took Izuku *years*.

Tommy looks at the two of them. "I won't tell," he declares with such certainty and honesty that Izuku believes him. Then Tommy suggests new sectors to train in, and that's that. Yet when there's no media uproar or breaking news or top headlines and millions of new articles spreading the word, Yagi looks at Tommy with a bit more trust, enough to say his true name, and Tommy grumbles and starts calling Yagi "Toshinori," and nothing really changes.

They've chosen the right person to trust, regardless if it was a reluctant decision.

One day, Yagi declares that Tommy will train him on how to use a baton. "For when you aren't able to use your Quirk, but only your physical prowess," he explains, and Izuku feels like there's millions of happy bees buzzing under his skin as he looks to Tommy with reverence and enthusiasm, as well as a smile that stretches from ear to ear. Tommy laughs, an oddly somber one as he twirls a metal staff in his hand. There's something that flashes in his eye that quickly disperses—perhaps it's nostalgia?)

No, never mind. Izuku just wants to swing a bat.

He gets to swing a baton as promised and he feels so *cool*. The coolest he's felt in literal years. No, no, it's *poggers!* (...That was how he used that word, right?)

...Though, it comes with a price. That price being to climb a mountain of trash and learn on the job.

Tommy had said this was for familiarity as he'd swung up to the top with his hands, feet, spatial awareness, and staff. Izuku could only gape as he moved up with so much expertise it seemed as if the teen had done it for years. He climbs just like how he fights: a mix of feral and graceful that's surprisingly effective. One moment Tommy's at the bottom, and then Izuku blinks and the blond's atop the junk, looking to the skies and screaming "fuck you, trauma!"

Not touching that yet.

Unfortunately, it's a lot harder than it looks. Despite Tommy's encouragements, Izuku can barely latch his hands on duller ends and stick his makeshift baton in between larger gaps. Honestly, Izuku hasn't tried copying the younger blond because if he did, he wouldn't have as much grace. And he would fall.

In the end, it's... *fun*. This is the best he's felt after eleven years. Izuku felt ecstatic at the start of this, and that adrenaline and joy hasn't diminished in the slightest. Even when Tommy panics at his lack of response and Izuku has to clear that up, he feels content. More content than he's ever felt in years.

...If this is a dream, please don't wake him up.

izuku finds himself going to takoda rather than his home when his burns ache and ache and ache from simply being at aldera, including today. he doesn't know why his mind's like this—really, he knows nothing at all, his body usually going on auto-pilot as his thoughts balk before they can be coherent. repeating motions he usually does, like smiling and curling in on himself and mumbling (though, it usually turns into incoherent nonsense on days like these, yet no one pays attention so it never matters. really, if he gradually stopped talking until he said nothing at all, no one would remember him.

that would be pleasant.)

tommy—or that blur of yellow and blue and red and white and brown—notices. that could just be all might, but it's not. izuku thought all might left a moment ago, but he hasn't been here for a while, has he?

the microwave in his hands is gently pried away, set down somewhere else, but izuku doesn't look to see where it is. there's a fog that covers his mind, covering his vision like a curtain. it's see-through enough to where he can realize that tommy's... taking him somewhere. his touch is grounding.

tommy brings him to a little cavern he's made for something. izuku blinks in astonishment when he sees the vast, albeit hazy, array of medicine, burn salves, bandages, bottles, and more. or, at least, that's what he thinks it is. it's all a mess, a smudge of shaded reds and blues and white and yellow and whatever other colors all over the place. izuku sets himself on a chair that tilts more with his weight on it and waits for tommy to sort through the plethora of bottles or materials or items.

tommy undoes the gauze that izuku had wrapped on himself (when? when had he done that? do the days blur together with the same repetitive motions so much he doesn't even notice the pain of mending wounds?) faintly, izuku can feel the soft press of a damp cloth on his arm, but he doesn't make a noise. the pain is just a faint spark, not enough to cause a flame. his eyes follow the ridged exterior of the wound, a zigzag-like edge that contrasts nastily with the paleness of his skin. even in this haze, it is clear.

"bad day?" tommy asks after a minute or ten or an hour. time slips through izuku's fingers like an hourglass, and he can never keep count, most times. ha.

izuku looks up just the slightest. "yeah."

"will you tell me who did this?"

"...no." izuku twitches as the cloth presses down again. "how do you know how to treat burns?"

"i'm just that big of a man!" then, "...but i do have my own."

ah.

izuku understands. he won't prod, even if the curiosity kills him.

It takes a bit, but the bandages are eventually done. "Those should be waterproof," Tommy claims after he ties the fabric with a knot, handing him some petroleum jelly. He starts reorganizing whatever he'd took out from his medicinal arsenal with ease, like he's done this a million times before, maybe somewhere else. "If they come loose, come to me—I'll always be here. Easier than going to your mom 'n' shit. 'Cause of the bandages, you'll be doing light exercises."

Izuku frowns. It's fine if he has extra work. He can handle that—he's had to deal with worse. Without looking back, Tommy continues, "Don't look at me like that, dickhead—you'll overwork your body and fucking collapse or feel like you're—like you're dying."

How did he even...? Izuku silently sighs, moving to exit the little medic cavern. He pauses right before he exits, though—he isn't too sure why.

After Tommy finishes inventorying his stuff, he turns around. He raises his brow at Izuku and asks, "What're you waiting for?"

"Can I hug you?"

Oh.

Oh. That slipped from his mouth before he could think.

Wait, no, pause—wasn't that a bit too much? To ask for? Oh no, not again, Izuku can't mess up his friendship with the first friend he's had in years! Why did he even speak oh god oh no he has to resolve this uh—

"W-W-Wait, I didn't mean to say that! Uh, p-please pretend that I didn't say that at all!" Oh god oh no why is Tommy blank-faced? Izuku stammers some more things he can barely make out in his panicked haze and spins on his feet, already making moves to get out. This is why Izuku should've stayed a loner, being social has never been his strong suit, God, *whyyyy* did he—

"A hug is fine!"

What.

"A hug is fine," Tommy repeats, looking down, and Izuku finds a shocked smile growing on his face. "You don't have to because I'm a Big Man who rarely needs hugs, but it's okay."

Before he himself even knows it, Izuku's barreling into Tommy, knocking them both to the ground. Tommy flinches, and oh, there's a lot hidden behind that, but Izuku relaxes his arms around him and he relaxes a little so it's fine. Sand covers their arms and clings to small drops of water, but it's nothing compared to Izuku's pure joy.

"Thank you," Izuku snuffles, tears welling in his eyes, "for caring."

Hesitant arms wrap around him. It burns pleasantly. "No problem, Midoriya."

"...You can call me Izuku."

"Alright then, Izuku."

When they pull apart, Izuku still feels tears on his face. Embarrassed, he wipes them away, instead looking up to Tommy with flushed cheeks and a smile. "Sorry," he says, "and thank you. I... I needed that."

Tommy gives him the second genuine smile the other has seen from him, and Izuku cherishes it like a relic.

Tommy is Dusk.

Izuku holds up the vigilante's costume in all of its glory, which... isn't really much? Because the hoodie is more so a patchwork of fabrics that cover large gaps, and more stitches than seams that line smaller tears, sewing those closed. And oh, wow, there's nothing under that? Does Dusk—Tommy? Does he fight with just this? Does he only have *this* to conceal his identity?

Only one way to find out.

"Hey, Tommy?" He calls.

"Yeah?"

"Is this what you've been hiding?"

Izuku turns to look up at Tommy, who is currently staring at him with a wide eye. Had he hid this here and forgotten about it?

Tommy hesitates, something out of character for him. "Are you going to call the police on me?" There's probably a deeper meaning behind that. Then again, Tommy is a mix of translucent layers to create one color.

The question isn't too hard to answer. "No," Izuku says easily, "I won't. Why would I? Dusk hasn't done anything bad. Hasn't done anything major, either, besides the Sludge Villain Incident—thank you for helping me out, by the way." He's also pretty sure that vigilante's can't be arrested under illegal quirk usage if they don't use it, but he can't be sure. Tommy hasn't used his, after all.

Even if Tommy has a hidden Quirk, why would Izuku be mad when he doesn't use it to fight?

...It's amazing.

Dusk, Tommy—whichever persona, he as a whole is amazing. Awe-inspiring. Extraordinary. He's talented like no other, being able to ward off so many without a quirk.

Izuku wants—wanted—to be like that. To be the representative for all who are Quirkless despite having, and say that *we are powerful too. We are a blank slate, we are a jack of all trades, because we may have no strengths, but we have no weaknesses, either. And we can be strong, just like everyone else—it just takes more time.*

Though with OFA, when he gets it, that might be a little too far away. Izuku could just use it as little as possible, but that probably won't last long. If he can't do it, however, then Tommy can.

"This is also my way of saying thank you for saving me, though I probably wouldn't report you even if we were strangers," he adds, and it's true. Both physically and mentally, during that Sludge Villain Incident. For not letting him die and for keeping his dream afloat. It's more than anyone has given him, besides this training from All Might.

Izuku won't say that, however, because it's too embarrassing to admit, so he goes for more minor truths. "Thank you for the bandages, the burn salve, the ointments, the training. Your trust, our friendship—thank you for it all."

"I—" Tommy fumbles. Izuku hums, knowing that words aren't his forte. "You don't have to answer," he says anyway. "Your actions are enough."

After a period of silence, Tommy finally mutters, "It's way too fucking early for you to be all sentimental an' shit." It sounds a bit strained.

Izuku chuckles sheepishly. "S-Sorry."

Suddenly, Tommy holds a hand out, gesturing towards the clothes. "Give that to me," he says, "I'll put it in my inventory."

...Inventory?

Izuku's curiosity bubbles in his throat, and before he knows it, it spills out in the form of a question.

Izuku... doesn't remember much about his bigger breakdown. What he *does* remember is trying to ask for advice about Kacchan, before smelling *smokefiresingedfabricburntflesh* and tasting ash and being clouded with thoughts of seeing explosions in his final memories, regardless of the environment. He remembers being hugged and comforted and feeling warm, bantering about colors right after.

He felt safe for a bit. It was nice.

As Izuku hands a Coca-Cola to Tommy, he silently prays this tranquility goes on forever.

Of course, nothing Izuku wants ever stays.

As Tommy sings of his homeland, Izuku stares.

Even with his eye closed, Tommy looks as if he's relishing in so much painful nostalgia. There's the shine of tears at the corners of his eye, one slipping down his cheek, his eyepatch growing wet. When he salutes, Izuku sees a soldier and it hurts. It hurts, the way Tommy's voice cracks. It hurts, the way Izuku can connect this moment to all of his previous theories and it makes sense.

Tommy was a soldier. No, Tommy was a *child* soldier.

Tommy has fought in carnage. He knows how to fight with a sword because he's used one to kill, yet uses a baton because maybe he's used one too *much*. He's tense and suspicious of new things and is always weary and cautious and analytical because he has to be to *survive*. Tommy's covered in scars because he's used explosions and fire and guns. Tommy doesn't trust adults because they've hurt him. His hands aren't too steady, and he sometimes leans on one side, and he holds a hand to his neck or covered eye because he's been wounded there.

Oh, God. He's almost been killed before, too, hasn't he.

But why go and be a vigilante? Where his muscle memory can accidentally kill someone, or battles that may trigger some sort of trauma that Izuku has yet to discover, or *something*—why?

...Izuku won't figure out. Not with the information he has now. And that's painful, knowing he can't know and can't help.

(Something deep in him frowns, however. Because Tommy smiles as if he's remembering something happy despite being a soldier, and. And Tommy is a soldier who has fought in wars and has gone

through so much and maybe has little to nothing left—and yet he still has something he can smile on for.

...Why can't Izuku have that, too? Compared to what Tommy has been through, Izuku is nothing, but. It hurts. Something in him longs for memories that he can cherish just like the blond instead of looking back and screaming at the cruelty of life—of *society* and it's *stupid influence*—because it tore his childhood apart. Tommy has been in hell and back at least twice over, but at least he's had friends to help him throughout it, and Izuku feel like he's still burning with nothing to latch on to, nothing to keep him steady, from shattering into pieces and falling, and—

—and he's jealous. *Envious*, longing for something he couldn't get until now, something he gets a theoretical glimpse at now. Jealousy isn't a new thing, no, not at all—he's very used to envy over Quirks. But this time it's raging and bubbling in his heart, nothing like the calm waves of acceptance he's used to. This envy claws and claws for something he can only hope to have.

And Izuku promptly shoves this away and keeps it under lock and key, because Izuku will be this new anchor in this place probably thousands of miles away from the blond's home. Tommy needs one more than him, after all.)

When the anthem is over, Izuku drags Tommy into a hug and forces himself to move on.

Izuku nears U.A. and feels significantly less confident than he did before going into the exams. Just being in the presence of the school makes him feel inferior. Due to regulations, he couldn't bring a staff to help him, so all he has is his physical prowess and, as his last resorts, One for All and/or the golden apples slices. Really, he should've gotten the Quirk earlier so that he could actually test his limits before the exams.

...Now that he actually thinks about it, he's screwed. Doesn't mean he won't try, though.

Izuku purses his lips and enters U.A. with the hope of someone who has already reached too far, before.

(That only worsens when he trips on like, the first step, but it's fine. He's saved by a nice girl, after all.)

Izuku's feet skirt against concrete as he starts rushing towards some nearby debris—the top part of a traffic pole, already broken off by a two-pointer—and rips out a makeshift baton. It weights differently which will affect his balance, and it has jagged edges, but it's steel and it will do. It's not enough to be sure he'll pass, but it's a fighting chance.

He jabs the end into the more softer points of the robot, wherein he can pry them open and maybe rip some vital wires out. But no—someone else always goes in for the final hit, laughing or focused as they kick his work away from him. Izuku grunts for the nth time, glancing at his hands to see them blistered and stinging as another participant slams a robot down nearby.

He's not fast enough. There's not enough time or remaining robots, either.

Izuku's fingers curl.

...That's fine. He's going against others who may have years of experience fighting, or have a more versatile Quirk. For one who just obtained a quirk and got ten months of rushed training, it's a miracle

he's even standing. He just has to move *faster* before all his chances leave.

Izuku ignores the burning pain as he grips his makeshift weapon, and moves.

The zero-pointer makes Izuku want to pull himself away with his staff, feel it dig into the ground and pull just to survive. His hands are burning, layers of skin ripped off his palms from blisters and not resting and it stings and stings and he has to move, and yet.

And yet—the nice girl is under there.

Izuku grits his teeth and turns so quickly his head spins, because if he's going to do something as suicidal as this, might as well go all in. He scrambles to his legs—or maybe he already was, as between one moment in the next he's in the sky with his legs flailing behind him, as if structure-less. They're a sickening purple, blood dripping down some spots, and if he focuses hard enough he feels a phantom rush of energy still in them. Around him the passing wind howls near his ears and runs through his hair, though it barely covers the thump-thump-thump of his heart. Izuku reels his arm back, makeshift staff now wielded as if a javelin, sharp end aimed directly at the Zero Pointer.

Izuku sucks in a breath, eyes trained on the machine before him. Time seems to slow. He thinks about the girl underneath the rubble—

(Lightning streaks across his arm as his muscles stretch.)

—gathering power to his arm, to his hand—

(The sleeve of his tracksuit explodes despite no impact. His arm fades into pink as it gathers a timeworn power that it's not ready for, climbing up his veins to his palm, and then to the steel rod itself. His starburst scars are lined with a brilliant yellow.)

—the built-up anger from eleven years, so present now it almost feels *tangible*, right between his fingers like clay—

("Use your emotions, especially your anger, to your advantage," Tommy says. He digs his staff into the sand of the shore, watching Izuku huff on the ground in front of him. With a hiss, Izuku brings himself to stand on his feet once more, light bruises and minor scrapes littering his form over his scars. He leans slightly on his own practice staff.

"What brought th-this up?" Izuku asks, tilting his head the slightest.

Taking that as an initiative to continue, Tommy twirls his weapon around. "I mean, it's only like a few fuckin' months til the entrance exams, yeah? Might as well give you an advantage now and make you practice it. For how fucking inexperienced you are to the average quirk user, you'll need it."

"Anyways, people usually think that being angry and shit makes people open and vulnerable." Tommy tries to twirl the reverse direction—he only manages to do so for a few, slow moments until the staff falls, "Fucking—ugh." He picks it back up and decides to fiddle with it instead. "Anyways, that isn't always true. If you use your anger or don't become consumed by it or whatever the fuck, you can kick ass without showing openings. It's like how anger—any emotion, really—makes people sort of, trade?

"They 'trade' accuracy and focus for twice the power or some shit. But if you practice being angry or any other overwhelming emotion during a fight, you'll grow to not trade the accuracy and focus and instead only get the power. Basically, keep a clear fuckin' head."

Izuku nods, saving that information for later. "Another spar?"

Tommy grins, getting into a stance. "Come at me, bitchboy."

(Izuku's eyes become the coldest that the teachers have seen. They are wide, locked on to their target, and if one were to be under his gaze they would feel as if they're being unraveled to the very soul. "He looks like a soldier," one whispers, and that implication is terrifying.)

—and Izuku *hurls* that makeshift javelin, a harsh wave of vertigo overcoming him as his body recoils. He flips, looking at the sky then ground then sky, and...

And he is there to see the fruits of his labor when the steel javelin seems to not hit, until it doesn't hit, but *pierces* through the Zero Pointer like nothing. Despite being slim it rips a hole through the machine that's at least twenty times bigger than itself. The perimeters of the gap break once, twice, creating a bigger dent and then a blast of wind. The lower mechanisms of the robot explode, adding to the gale that comes after, now painfully warm. His ears ring and his chest feels like its constricting and wow, yeah, blast-force *hurts*.

Izuku makes a strangled yelp as he's shoved back, broken limbs flailing. He can barely react when he starts falling, only able to feel the draft that blows against his face, disheveling his hair and forcing him to close his eyes. There's the faint thought of golden apples and time before impact before Izuku's unbroken hand finds itself shoving a slice in his mouth. He chews, head swirling with an incoming headache, and sees the faintest trails of pink steam seep through his skin.

Yet, the ground comes closer with all of its dents and stones and sharp edges and rough terrain and yeah, no, even with this he won't be conscious. Izuku gulps as he hears the faint cracks of his legs shifting back into place, closing his eyes and—

—and something smacks his cheek. He levitates as a flow of pink steam that smells faintly of flora wafts from his skin. When his bones shift back with a excruciating crack, Izuku hisses, closes his eyes and thanks that someone like the nice girl exists before promptly passing out.

Izuku passes, Tommy beaming at him. He passes with zero villain points and sixty rescue points and Izuku feels the dangerous hope in his chest flutter higher.

"What kind of dirty tricks did you use to get into U.A., *huh?*!"

Bakugo throws Izuku against the wall. He draws a pained breath as his back crashes with the old brick wall, looking up at his childhood acquaintance with squinted eyes. He futilely claws at the hand that covers his neck, feeling phantom sparks light up underneath.

Bakugo continues with a scowl that mars his face. *"I was supposed to fucking be 'the first student from his school to go to U.A.!' I was supposed to be the only fucking one who went! I fucking told you to go somewhere else, stupid fucking Deku!"*

"Bakugo." The last name feels so foreign on his tongue, but being with Tommy, as well as several long nights of staring at his ceiling and contemplating his relations, has rebuilt Izuku to say that instead of "Kacchan."

(Something between them is lost. [Was it ever there after they turned four?])

Bakugo freezes, eyes wide and surprised, and the air feels ten degrees cooler. Izuku bulldozes on, "S-Someone has shown me that regardless o-of who I may be, I can become a h-he—*hero*. That with enough w-work and effort and *time*, I can achieve w-what I want. And that... that as long as th-there's someone who *believes* i-in me, someone who has s-supported me ever since I m-met them, *I can be a hero*."

Izuku grips the hand at his neck tighter with gritted teeth. "So that's why," he declares, taking a daring look up, ripping the hand away from his throat, "*t-that's why I'm going to U.A.!*"

"Oh, wow!" Uraraka exclaims, drawing attention and oh *no*, "Midoriya! Your hero costume's so cool!" She pauses, staring at his neck and why couldn't the costume cover the scar there?

Izuku's mind focuses on the compliment. "R-Really?" He manages, shifting his hoodie cover to hover over his neck, "Aha—I-I didn't think it w-was anything s-special!" Because it isn't—

"No, no!" Uraraka smiles, but she still stares. "You look like a cool tactical hero, y'know?"

Izuku looks down at his dark hoodie, with the only pops of color being a forest green that fades to neon, a dark maroon belt with mini pockets, and his red shoes. His mom had made this as an apology for back then. Long strips line the sides of his arms, sides, and down his pant legs with the green gradient. His fingers flex, pale tone contrasting with the almost-black fabric of his long, finger-less gloves. And in his belt pouches, there's mints to keep him focused, as well as a few golden apple slices and extra space for more items he may need.

Well, there's also all the med stuff he could fit on the inside, which his mom doesn't know about. As well as the iron guards on his shoulders, elbows, forearms, knees, tips of his boots, shins, and over his knuckles that his mom also does not know about. But no one needs to know.



Oh! Right!

With a shake of his wrist, a steel staff comes out of his hoodie sleeve and through a hole in the middle of his finger-less gloves, slotting just right in his hand and expanding. The empty feeling that it leaves in his sleeve is covered by another retracted staff. There should be like a few extra literally up his sleeve, just in case this one breaks.

Izuku grins, "Poggers." He added this last minute and it works!

Uraraka stares.

Wait, wasn't he just saying that his costume wasn't special? Oh *no*—

"L-Like I said," Izuku murmurs, looking away, and wow if he seems like he's flexing just for praise he'll seem horrible, "nothing s-special."

Before Uraraka can respond All Might starts the lesson. Izuku breathes a sigh of relief and turns to his instructor, trepidation swirling in his gut.

Izuku purses his lips when All Might calls teams A and D as heroes and villains respectively.

This... was not going to go well.

He starts planning as soon as All Might says start, going over plans and tackling them with logic.

This building is crowded as Izuku walks in, metal, tile-like walls plastered all over. So, even if he could control it to a T, OFA is a no-go. Both Bakugo and Iida are limited by this amount of space as well, the latter not being able to move as much and the former having to use smaller explosions so as to not risk himself. Blast force and recoil are dangerous in these places, after all—enough force and anyone can be slammed into a wall and immediately handled with.

...Unless Bakugo actually considers his and his partner's safety. Because he's against Izuku, Bakugo will want to do whatever it takes to win. He's always been like that.

And then there's Izuku's new experience, as well as Uraraka's quirk. Izuku feels a staff slide into his palm with the twist of his wrist, lightly scrapping against the ground. The sound vibrates in the corridors, echoing. So they can't really talk too loud, huh? And Bakugo may be heard if he's shouting... Thank god Dagobah and Tommy helped with spatial awareness.

Izuku uses the miniature speaker given for long-distance communication, quietly summarizing this for Uraraka. She slowly nods at first, and then with more confidence, absorbing this information like a sponge. But Izuku falters near the end.

What can Uraraka use her quirk on? There's nothing but metal walls as far as both of them can tell.

...Well, her quirk is suited for close-combat with the five-finger contact and all. Iida may also be specialized for close-combat, his quirk only inhabiting his legs. In addition, when Bakugo eventually finds Izuku, he'll focus on him and no one else, leaving Uraraka to Iida.

"Hey," Izuku murmurs, "do you mind if you just follow my plan? I don't want to seem bossy or anything."

"I don't!" Uraraka quietly chirps, sheepishly rubbing the back of her head, "I'm not good with coming up with battle strategies on the spot yet, unlike you, so..."

"Okay, thank you."

"Mhm!"

The green haired teen quickly shoots another staff out, pressing it into Uraraka's hands. He flips a pouch on his belt open and takes out a golden apple slice, also handing that to her. "Eat it only when you're severely injured, okay?" Izuku whispers into the speaker. "You're going to be with Iida because Bakugo will be focused on me. When Iida kicks towards you, try to use the staff to block against his legs. Then, make that small pocket of time you have into one wherein you can use your Quirk—just touch any part of his suit with it and try to make it last as long as you can while you go for the bomb. Fighting should be your last option. If Iida's floating in the air he'll have no way to attack you, because I don't think he'll know how to handle being without gravity."

"If he does," Izuku stresses, "or if you *can't* block, just keep heading *straight for the bomb*." Because sometimes it doesn't matter if the villain is defeated, so long as their plan is tarnished. Having both the villain and their plan be neutralized is a best case scenario despite it constantly being seen in everyday life. If this were real, then the ultimate goal would be to defeat the bomb, as that would destroy this very building and its surroundings. Chaos is one of the things most villains want, and an activated bomb will give that to them, even if they die for it.

In addition, neither he nor Uraraka can defeat Bakugo. Not yet. But, Izuku can certainly stall, and as long as Uraraka gets the bomb they win.

Uraraka stares quizzically at the apple slice but nods in affirmation nonetheless.

...There was also another plan he was thinking of. One that's risky for him and victory and probably a last resort, but a plan nonetheless.

Before he can even explain it, the corridor beside them explodes, something also blasting the wall in front of it. Izuku tackles Uraraka down, shoving them both back. His face feels a bit singed and there's that spike of *fear-fear-fear*, but any injuries he gets are nothing major. He murmurs as such when his teammate glances at him with furrowed brows, ignoring her look and quickly getting on his feet.

From the opening, smoke and dust billow through the ridges. Bakugo swipes it away with the swing of his arm, a scowl on his lips. "Come, shitty Deku," he instigates, voice scarily calm. "Don't start dodging, now."

"Uraraka, go!" Izuku orders, getting in a stance with a staff in hand as Bakugo charges forwards. Then, using their interconnected radio and a quieter volume: "Don't worry about me and just focus on the bomb!" He hears a hesitant "okay!" and the fading pounds of footsteps.

"I won't do so much damage that this fight gets stopped," Bakugo snarls, "*but I'm gonna get close!*" Right hook right hook right *hook*—

Izuku darts forwards, hands digging into Bakugo's right arm just as he goes for the hit. He twists his body as his heart pounds like a drum, and he lifts up and *screams* as uses his body weight to slam Bakugo down onto the ground. A cloud of dust springs from the impact, Izuku gasping for air as his arms sting. He looks around—Uraraka's gone, good. The faster she gets there the higher chance they have.

"I am not D-Deku." Izuku heaves, watching Bakugo gradually get up, "Once, I may have been... Because I was too scared to stand up... For myself, and no one... believed in me. But now?"

"Now, someone has faith in me, that I can be a hero..." Regaining his breath, Izuku clenches the staff in his hands. "And I will not let him down!"

The kick to his head almost hits, fortunately being deflected in time by Izuku's forearm. Using the capture tape to catch Bakugo off-balance, Izuku quickly uses his staff to block the blond's next right hook. He uses that pocket of time to dodge, dashing down the corridors and going through many twists and turns. Izuku tries to steady his breathing, hearing his breath ricochet around the halls. He needs a plan, to keep going, *pronto*.

"Hey!" Bakugo screams, distantly. "You fucking *tricked* me, didn't you?! Was it fun tricking me all this time?!"

...Trick? Oh—OFA, he doesn't know about OFA, right. He was still Quirkless to Bakugo (and God damn it that will bring *problems*.) Izuku keeps running, feet feather-light against the floor.

"You've fucking got a flashy Quirk there, don't you?!" The quiet clink of gauntlets resounds across the halls. "Try and fucking get me with it, 'cause I'm *better than you*!" Izuku ignores the taunt, focusing on what direction the sound is coming from—he's a few corridors down, keep moving, keep *moving*—and going in the opposite direction.

Regardless of limitations, it would've been better to send Iida to defeat himself and Uraraka. He'd be able to go through the halls and take them down faster and maybe quieter—ah, but with the armor, maybe not. Despite this, Bakugo would be better defense, being able to push Uraraka away with explosions and tactical intellect.

If there's no empirical plan... then Bakugo is going on his own. Making his own plans, ones away from Iida. So their communication is awful, then—which is good. Just gives Izuku and Uraraka a fighting chance.

"Midoriya!"

Izuku blinks, bringing a hand to his ear and whispering, "Uraraka! H-How's your progress?"

"I found the bomb on the middle of the fifth floor, but..." Someone laughs in the distance; Uraraka snorts but continues. "Iida found me, and he's taken everything on the ground so I can't use it, sorry. Right now, he's slowly moving towards me."

...Wait, that's right above them!

"Hold him off for now," Izuku orders, unrolling the capture tape in his hands. "I'll help soon."

"Right!"

The sudden beep of a contraption makes Izuku start. He turns, locking eyes with Bakugo who raises the gauntlet wrapped around his arm. "They're loaded," Bakugo states. His mouth splits into a terrifying grin. "Why won't you use your fucking Quirk? Why are you using a *staff*, huh? Are you saying you can win even if you don't use it, even if you use a metal fucking *pole* instead? Are you *underestimating* me, *Deku*?"

Izuku's legs shake. He forces himself to push aside the scent of *smokeexplosionashsingedskin* and looks up, getting into a stance once again.

Bakugo takes that as an answer. "With your stalking, you probably already know..." He raises his arm, gauntlet faced towards Izuku, who glances around. Right, he was *right*—Bakugo doesn't care about safety at all, only about winning. He always has. "...but my Quirk, Explosion, lets me secrete nitroglycerin-like sweat from the sweat glands of the palm of my hand and make it combust."

Unlatching a compartment in the gauntlet's grenade-like handle, Bakugo reveals a pin and *oh* that is a *death sentence*.

(Maybe if he'd been presented with this before, Izuku would've just... accepted it. Feel Death close his eyes and be fine. But he has things—more people, ideas, goals—to *live* for now, not just the monotony routine he centered himself around before, or that little thread of hope he tied himself around. And Izuku knows he's selfless—too selfless, more so self-*harming* for what he can only presume is the right thing—but he is only human, so he will selfishly keep these people and ideas and goals near his chest and never let them be taken.

Not again; *never* again.)

Izuku hurriedly opens the pocket that holds his golden apple slices. "If they made this the way I asked," his opponent says, getting in a stance with a finger on the trigger, "then these gauntlets have stored nitroglycerin inside them, and...!"

Izuku stuffs a golden apple into his mouth and puts the staff he holds in front of him with his offhand, using his other to prepare OFA in three fingers. The amount of blast force he'll receive if he doesn't run will be immense, but if he can just reflect this back or neutralize it with an equally powerful force, then—

Bakugo pulls the pin.

The explosion starts in slow-motion, and Izuku doesn't even realize anything major's happened until it's *raging*, bursting forwards like a bullet. Izuku releases OFA just as the wave of power nears him, feeling the heat card through his hair and bring flares of phantom pains to his skin. It's all blocked soon enough, most of the heat moving above him as OFA's force pushes it back. He can just barely see Bakugo dodge the reflected attack by going into a nearby corridor just to his side. The windows across the hall shatter with the force of the remaining heat, the floor shaking like an earthquake was happening. Izuku's fingers breaks but heals in an instant, bones soon shifting back in place as his skin turns from a gruesome purple to a light cream once more.

How was something like the gauntlets even allowed for an *inexperienced first year*?

As the resulting recoil and gust settle down, Izuku breathes in the colored steam from his skin after consuming the golden apple slice and looks up, seeing Bakugo stomp towards him with a wicked grin. The staff in the green haired teen's hands is heated and it burns his palms. "Holy shit," Izuku's opponent breathes happily. "Hey, Deku, did you know? The more that's stored in these gauntlets, the stronger the blast!" The other gauntlet—oh no, *the other gauntlet with an equal amount of nitroglycerin*—lights up. "Come on, use your fucking Quirk on *me this time, Deku!*"

Bakugo stops just feet away, arm raised, and with it, impending doom falling onto Izuku's shoulders. "I'll force you to surrender even if you're at full strength!"

"Hey, hey," Bakugo taunts, "what's the matter, Deku? I didn't fucking hit you, so you can still move, can you? Come and get me!" Izuku opens his mouth to respond—

"Midoriya!"

Izuku purses his lips, setting a hand on his speaker as he gets up, "Uraraka! How's your situation?"

"It's not going well. Iida knows what we're trying to do, I think—he's moving the bomb instead of going for me."

"Ignoring me still, shitty Deku?!" Bakugo glares. All Might's voice cuts in—good, enough time for him to talk to Uraraka.

"Just hang close to a pillar and grab onto it when I call, alright? I've got a plan, but you have to trust me and go with it." Izuku feels his body scream while he thinks about this very, *very* hazardous plan.

"...Okay! Over and out!"^[1]

Izuku snaps back into focus, seeing Bakugo blast towards him. "Let's fight it out with our fists!" He screams, palm cupped to blast Izuku's face with his Quirk. Izuku flinches violently, hands coming up in an X in front of his face because *he's in Aldera again in its dingy bathroom being kicked around by*

—by an explosion to his back that almost makes him *screech* as his scars writhe. Izuku bites his cheek and breathes in and out, calming himself as he turns his head. He sets a hand on his back and only feels the tendrils of smoke seeping through—good, none of his skin is showing. He can rest easy.

"Look, *here I come!* It's your favorite right swing!" A hand slams itself into Izuku's back. He hisses, feeling a hand grab his arm and swing him around, using explosions as momentum.

"Listen here, *Deku!* You are—" Izuku feels his body wail as he's thrown to the ground "*—below me!*"

Izuku can't think—he isn't given *time* to think—feeling his mind switch from one place to another. Because he's in Aldera—no, U.A.—and he's being slammed to the ground—All Might should've stopped this, why, why, *why*—and Izuku can feel the starburst burns on his form crawl—no, no, he's okay, *he's okay*—and he can't run and he's so pitifully weak so he lays there as people mock him—and he needs to focus—"Please, *not again,*" he cries out, because it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, and—and he needs to *focus*—

This is U.A. He's not alone.

...He needs to carry out his plan, *now*.

Izuku breathes hard, feeling his hand in his hair leave. Then, getting up as his body protests vehemently, he snatches his broken staff that had fallen from his grasp and looks at Bakugo, who... who stares at him back as if he's done something shocking. Gritting his teeth, Izuku uses all of his limbs and his staff, shortened as it may be, to move forwards where Uraraka should be. Bakugo follows after a few moments, holding steady, but his face is still... surprised. It soon morphs back into his classic angry expression, however.

"...*Why* won't you use your Quirk on me?" He demands. "Why are you still holding on to that that *shitty fucking weapon?* Are you *still* fucking underestimating me?"

Izuku looks down, feeling so many indescribable emotions rise in his chest.

"You've been like this ever since we were kids," Bakugo continues. "Watching my every move, latching on to me... Have you been underestimating me like that since then, you shitty bastard?!"

"That's not it, man!" Izuku screams, grabbing his hair because he's so tired and exhausted and everything hurts and he just wants this *over* with. "That's *never been it!* I just—I want to win and surpass you because you're *amazing*, not because I'm *underestimating* you, you *idiot!*"

But Bakugo, Bakugo will never get it. "Don't look at me like that, you fucking nerd!" He roars, ignoring Izuku's words like he always, always has and going in for the final hit. Izuku bites his tongue, raising his fist, firing OFA up for the second time. And when Bakugo swings towards his arm

Izuku does not.

"Let's go, Uraraka!" He yells, changing his trajectory and letting OFA rip into the floors above him. His other arm is raised to his face, vambrace ready to block his eyes, his grip flipped so that what remains of his staff can at least try to help alleviate the upcoming damage.

Bakugo's hit lands impact right before OFA's does—glass shatters, concrete breaks, the very structure of this building collapsing in on itself as a gust of wind rushes through the middle. Heat—scorching, burning, *get it off*—plasters the side of his face and—*move, get away, get away*—Izuku *heaves*, breaths ragged and sporadic, lungs burning. His throat is dry and his skin burns, burns, burns and bleeds and he can barely stay awake. His hand that grips the staff—the heat has melted the top and bottom off—releases its hold, letting the melted metal clatter to the ground.

("I got it, Midoriya!" Uraraka says, voice glitched through the almost-destroyed radio. Izuku cracks a tiny smile that he can't keep up.

They win.)

"That's what... From the *start*, you were..." Bakugo finally manages, looking up with—with a kind of defeat Izuku's never seen on his face before. "You *are* underestimating me, aren't you?!"

"Is that all y-y—you got from this?! Stop s-saying that I'm underestimating *you*, God damn it!" Izuku screams, voice hoarse as it cracks, jaw wailing with the effort and pain. His voice seems to reach the top but he doesn't *care*. He's so tired; so, so *tired*. "Why is it all about *estimation* for you?! Can you just *listen to me* for *once in your life!*"

When Izuku swallows, it's painful. He has to wrap this up quick because his jaw is *throbbing*. "I—wasn't. Planning on using my Quirk, for a *reason*," Izuku grunts, arms flaring with pain. The scars on both are revealed, even with the melted, broken vambraces and the added, fresher burns but he can't find a reason to care at the moment. (Bakugo does.) "My body... it's too weak. Can't—" A wave of pain makes him wail, but he shuts it up with ease. Thank Aldera for that, because every time he cried out there, they'd keep hurting him. "It can't handle the i-*impact*."

Methodically, with his non-dominant hand, Izuku cracks his pouch with the golden apple slices open and slowly puts one in his mouth, his eyes hazed over as he closes the pouch. His jaw can barely chew, and both of his arms fall slack at his sides. Smoke that steamed from his arms slowly diminished, the burnt skin and his broken arm still in the air healing. Pink steam rolls off of his body, billowing out the broken windows.

Staggering, Izuku collapses to the ground as he runs out of energy, just barely swallowing the apple slice. His broken arm shifts, suddenly, before a sharp series of *cracks* ring in the air because Izuku's arm just fixed itself in seconds and *God*, that hurt. As he bites his hand on the arm with less damage to muffle his cries, he wonders how he's even differentiating the pain anymore. Either way, he manages to hear All Might hesitantly call out, "Hero... Hero team wins!"

Izuku feels his body *sag* with relief and exhaustion, and after his arm cracks once more, he passes out.
[\[2\]](#)

When Izuku hears how Bakugo left early, his legs itch to go after him. He feels himself turn around, to tell someone a small piece about this burden, but... he pauses, right as he's about to leave.

The only person Izuku has told about OFA is Tommy, and even that was with All Might's consent.

Is Bakugo really a good person to share an ancient secret with? Is Bakugo allowed to be privy to this precious thing, even if it's only a tenth of the truth? Something that can affect millions, if not *billions* if given to the wrong person...

(—*can feel the starburst burns on his form crawl*—)

Izuku purses his lips. He turns back around, shrugging off stares and answering a select few questions.

"Hey, Midoriya," Uraraka asks on the day of the USJ field trip, "why do you have an extra bag?"

Izuku thinks of Tommy's fretting and sheepishly scratches his head. He gives the bag a small jostle. "E-Extra things. Just something in c-case things go wrong in one of the d-disaster zones. And I-I've also got my staffs in there."

With an acknowledging "oh," Uraraka stands besides him and starts talking about how cool he (apparently) was during the combat training. Izuku hides his face behind his bag, face flaming, and thinks that he'll have fun today.

Tommy was right.

Izuku steps back as the lights suddenly fizz out, going counterclockwise until the entire stadium is dimmed. More importantly, there's a *shift* in the air as something akin to a vortex materializes, warping the space around it.

"Sir!" Izuku alerts, pointing behind Aizawa. His teacher whirls around, eyes wide, watching with the class as that dark vortex expands. It stretches and widens, obscuring the fountain from view.

A hand reaches out of it; Izuku's already rifling through his bag and taking a steel baton out.

"Gather together and don't move!" Aizawa barks. Dread settles over Izuku like an uncomfortable weighted blanket. "Thirteen, protect the students!"

Hands, then arms, heads—*villains* move out of the portal, what Izuku can only assume is the leader at the front with hands covering his face and body. *Dismembered* hands.

Kirishima says something about the start of the lesson and god, Izuku wishes it was. But he interrupts, heart hammering, because this isn't the time to fool around, not now. "Kirishima, those are v-v—*villains*! Why would people like that be a part of *rescue training*?! If they're a part of rescue training then they should look like damaged c-civilians, yeah?" Izuku's hands are shaking as he gets into a stance, "This isn't practice at all!"

Before anyone can refute, Aizawa looks at Izuku. "Midoriya, *don't move*. Don't fight." Izuku stares past him because no, no, no—they're outnumbered, this class is too small and inexperienced, he can already count at least twenty villains and *rising*. Aizawa is an underground hero, he's meant for quick attacks and short bursts for quick eliminations, for one-on-one fights, not *this*. Thirteen is a rescue hero, as well—they aren't as prepared as Aizawa is to fight, so if villains swarm the only entrance and escape, then—

His teacher slides his signature yellow goggles onto his eyes anyways. "He is right," Aizawa affirms, the air filling with dread. "Those are villains."

"Shouldn't we, I don't know," Izuku presses, "*run?*"

Before his teacher can answer, a disembodied voice speaks out. "Thirteen and Eraserhead, huh?" It sounds... disappointed. Why? Izuku doesn't have time to ponder when the portal forms two diagonal streaks of yellow—eyes, those are its *eyes*. "The teacher's schedule we received the other day—"

"The *break-in*," Izuku whispers. Oh God, the *break-in*—

"—said that All Might was also supposed to be here."

Aizawa comes to the same conclusion as Izuku does. "The trespassing the other day was the work of these scumbags after all, huh?" Izuku can barely hear him, mind swimming as villains stalk forward, all centered in the middle plaza. He can see smiles, grins, unashamed and blood-lusty and morally-deranged.

They don't mind killing kids.

Izuku forces himself to breathe and not think about being ripped apart.

"Where is he?" A scratchy, hoarse voice rings out. Some sort of monster stands next to the presumed leader, brain exposed, body disproportionate, and sharp teeth on display. "I went through the whole trouble of bringing this crowd, too..."

"All Might... The Symbol of *Peace*... I can't believe he's not here. I wonder if he'll come if we kill some kids?"

Aizawa activates his Quirk, his capture weapon rising into the air, and everything else is distant.

Izuku breathes, in and out. They're after All Might, and no one just makes claims about killing All Might unless they have enough power to back it up. The hero-in-training can feel the world freeze as he comes to a single conclusion: there's a villain strong enough to defeat the Symbol of Peace, and if All Might's time is too little, if his wound is too grave, Izuku will be alive to see him fall. That is, if he's alive at all.

Focus; *focus*.

"Teacher!" Momo thankfully gives him something to focus on, looking at Thirteen. "What about the trespasser sensors?"

The electricity went out, so those are disabled. Probably. Someone here's disrupting the electrical signal, which caused the lights to break. So—

Izuku zones back in as soon as Todoroki mentions something about a goal. "They're after A-All Might," Izuku says. He doesn't let anyone speak. "That's their goal. No one just makes an implied

threat about—about taking down *the* Sy-Symbol of Peace. No one comes to U.A. and thinks of counter-measures, of d-di-di—*disrupting* signals to prevent communication, of specifically timing when they'd a-appear, when and how to prepare... No one does this without certain c-c-con—*confidence* that All Might can be taken down, because he's the Symbol of Peace.

"I *know* that the signal's been disrupted because the light fissures up above are out," he adds, gesturing up, mind running and running and planning for survival, "so, so, so who's to say that the person that's blocking electromagnetic waves aren't block-blocking radiowave-signals, too?"

"Thirteen, start the evacuation," Eraserhead cuts in, walking forwards. "I'm leaving it to you." No, no, no, that's such a *bad idea*—

Eraserhead leans forward on the first step of stairs and *leaps* off anyway, hair wildly flying behind him as he readies his capture weapon. Izuku stops a panicked noise from escaping his throat, instead choosing to watch as his teacher makes the running option unavailable, curse his selfless heart. His mind feels like it's been dunked into panic, his hands shaking and shaking and *what can he do?*

Iida grabs his arm, tugging him away from the scene. Izuku remembers to breathe and tries to pull away but *wow*, the class president's grip is strong, forcing him to follow.

That warp vortex villain materializes in front of the class, and Izuku can only scowl at the long, long lane that leads to the exit. *Why* is it so long, anyway? No, no, never mind—Izuku focuses on what the villain's saying.

"We are the League of Villains; nice to meet you," the living portal begins. "It may be presumptuous of us, but we have invited ourselves into the home of the heroes, U.A. High School, in order to have All Might, the Symbol of Peace, take his last breath."

Thirteen can't do anything here. Their Quirk—Black Hole—can disperse or absorb some of the portal, yes, but what happens when that's reflected back on them? This villain is essentially a portal, after all, and it's most likely a two-way one. Thirteen's not immune to their own quirk, either; the many videos and clips Izuku has seen and watched online can prove it.

Ultimately, no one here can do anything. No Quirk here can disperse something like a portal all at once, only chunks of it at a time. Even then, because it seems like mist, it'll come back, forming once more, and any progress will be for naught.

Izuku grits his teeth in fear and frustration.

When Thirteen unclasps the tip of their finger on their costume, Izuku hears himself shout, "D-Don't *do that!*"

It's useless, anyway, because Bakugo and Kirishima launch in for an attack and of course they do, of course *they're* the ones who do it. An explosion blasts the villain in what should've been a direct hit, but Izuku's stomach pummels because it's not one at all. Smoke clouds his vision, causing him to only be able to hear Kirishima's next words.

"Did you consider that you'd get beaten by us before you did it?" Kirishima asks cockily, and Izuku wants to scream.

The mists portal just forms back, exactly like Izuku predicted. "Oh dear, that's dangerous." They muse. "That's right; even if you are students, you're excellent golden eggs."

"No use—move away, you two!" Thirteen exclaims and NO—

"He'll reflect it at you, Thirteen!" Izuku practically yells, "He's a *portal*!"

Thirteen stops just in time, but the villain doesn't. "My job is to scatter you all and torture you to death!" They exclaim, expanding and covering the entire class. Tendrils of black mist encase Izuku and he shoves back a call for help in his throat as he's dragged somewhere else.

After this, he's never taking Tommy for granted again.

Izuku screams as his body flips, now going head-first into a large body of water. He takes as much air in as he can, quickly snapping his mouth closed when he actually impacts the water. His body protests at the impact, but he forces his eyes open and—no, he can't see! Whatever chemicals are in the water—maybe salt, maybe chlorine—stings! Desperately, Izuku swims up, movements sluggish and slowed.

Something next to him gets slammed. Izuku hears someone call him, feels something wrap around his waist, and then he's *heaving* for air as he's dragged out the lake. He blinks rapidly, pushing through the pain as he feels the water being pushed out of his eyes. His back lands on the surface of something—a ship? This is the Shipwreck Zone, then—and he can't be more grateful for it. Someone lands behind him—from their voice, they sound like Mineta.^[3]

"Th-Thank you, Asui!" Izuku belatedly says as he gets up, watching the frog-quirk user climb aboard by scaling the side of the ship.

"Call me Tsu," she says, climbing over. "Right—sorry, Tsu," Izuku sheepishly laughs. Some of the tension leaves his mind, but he quickly gains this stress back when As—*Tsu* mentions how bad the situation has become. All of them look out at the lake, glancing at the blurry, darkened figures underneath the surface.

Izuku nods, "Agreed. The villains were the ones who broke into U.A., using the media invasion to get the schedule from there. This is planned."

Mineta points out on the lake, right at villains moving through the surface. "M-M-Midoriya!" He exclaims, "What do we do about them?!" The villains shout profanities and curses below.

Oh—they're *surrounded*.

Izuku breathes, ignoring Mineta panicking further as he tries to keep his own emotions in check. Now's not the time for panic. He just has to make a plan, pronto.

Okay, okay—consider the situation. Tsu has frog-like characteristics, so she's specialized for water. Which is beneficial, as of now. The villains are expecting them to go into the water to fight, as there's no nearby land.

...Wait. That doesn't make sense. Why are the villains expertly placed in their specialized zones, but not the reverse for the students? Did the mist villain randomized where the students were sent? Oh—they only got the U.A. *schedule*! They didn't see the student records because the whole point of the attack is to—to kill All Might, not the students. Maybe they got the formatting of the USJ, as well, due to the placement of their troops, but the student records were probably left untouched due to not enough time to look through them, memorize the contents, and go, or it just wasn't thought to be necessary. Taking the files would be too suspicious for just a "media break-in," anyway.

If All Might were here and they succeeded in—killing him, they probably would have tried to kill them all because of the hopelessness that would inflict. The very thought sends a cold shiver down Izuku's spine.

Regardless, this means that these pawn villains don't know about their Quirks.

"That's true," Tsu nods along. Izuku blinks, cupping his mouth. He's gotta stop mumbling. "S-Sorry!"

"It's fine, ribbit."

"A-Anyways," he mumbles, "they've planned to overthrow us based on n-n—*numbers* and general inexperience. If we can just make our Q-Quirks work together, somehow, to create an even bigger advantage, then we can win."

"A—Tsu, Mineta," Izuku says, "give me the characteristics of your quirk."

Tsu immediately starts. "I can jump high, stick to walls, and stick my tongue out up to about 20 meters. I can also spit out my stomach and wash it, and secrete toxic mucus that actually just stings a little. The last two are practically useless, so you can probably forget about them."

Izuku nods. "I have, plainly put, super strength. I'm basically a one-trick pony, however. One hit and my hand or arm is out of commission, unless I'm focused, which is something we can't afford. Yet..." Tugging the straps of his damp bag, the teen gestures to it. "My friend can grow, uh—they can grow special apples, which hold healing properties. I only have f-f-f-fi—" Izuku shuts his mouth, cursing his stutter, and tries again. "I only have five slices since they only grow once a year n-no matter how much my friend tries, but they can heal me, as shown yesterday. So, I have five tries. A-And I'm also good at close-combat with a blunt weapon, but that won't work in w-water, so."

"Oh!" Izuku slips his bag off and ruffles through it, taking out the extra set of armor Tommy gave him. "Take this," he says, passing the set over to Tsu. "I'm wearing another set, uh, right now. This is the only o-one I have besides my own, so. Despite their Quirk, my friend likes to work with metals and th-th-the like, so this is pure metal. Equip it now j-just in case."

Tsu nods, fumbling with the metal and its leather straps, but learning how to strap the pieces on with much more ease than expected.

Izuku smiles in satisfaction, turning to Mineta who's staring off into nothing, thinking about... he doesn't wanna know. "You, Mineta?"

Mineta snaps out of his daze after a few seconds of staring. "My Quirk lets me stick these things super tight," he says, taking a ball from his head and attaching it to the side of the ship. His gloved hands tap on the sphere lightly, bouncing off. "Depending on how I'm feeling, they can stick for a whole day. They grow back when I pull them off, but if I pull off too many, then I'll start bleeding. They don't stick to me; they just bounce off."

...Why isn't it sticking to his glove if his hand is covered by it? How does it know who isn't Mineta and who is through fabric?

Izuku mentally smacks himself. Not now, later.

"Is it water-re-resistant?" Izuku immediately asks. "Like, even in water, is it still sticky?"

"...I think so? I haven't tried that," Mineta admits. He looks at the water below them and pales drastically. "But now? I think we should just wait for the heroes to come!"

"We *are* the heroes for now, Mineta," A—Tsu bluntly states.

Mineta whimpers.

Assuming that Mineta's Quirk can be effective in water, that can be used as something to bound the villains, blocking their movement advantage in the zone. Maybe Tsu could use her tongue to carry Mineta above in order to use his quirk? Wait, no—if someone has a Quirk that can sort of manipulate water, her tongue could be cut off. They'll just swim away before their comrades touch them, anyway.

Izuku's the only one who can maybe deal actual damage, even underwater. If Mineta drops some of his... sphere things into the water, and some villains are stupid enough to get trapped with each other, that'd be an advantage. However, OFA in general is suited for an area that's more open; in the water, where his movements are slowed and he can't see or breathe? That's a no-go.

Wait. So what happens when he doesn't aim at the villains, but at the *water* instead? What happens when he makes a large, gaping hole in a body of water? OFA has enough blast force to do that, like in the hero training incident. Wouldn't that have the same effect as swishing a plastic water bottle around and watching the water inside make a mini-bubble tornado? So the water would spin and spin, dragging things towards the center in order to find equilibrium... And then, the reflected blast force could be used as propulsion...

That could work!

Suddenly, a large clawed hand formed of water rises, slashing the ship. Izuku stumbles with a yelp, catching on to Tsu's arm so as to not lose balance. He looks up at the hand, hearing a villain exclaim, "I'm getting impatient. Let's end this quickly!" As a hand made of water tears the ship into two.

Izuku staggers as the halves move inwards and sink. "As—Tsu, Mineta," he calls, "Trust me on whatever I say for now! I'll—*hopefully*—get us out of here!" He channels his fear into power and breathes, tugging on Tsu's sleeve.

"Let's go."

They live.

Izuku laughs incredulously, bordering hysteria as Tsu helps all three of them flee. His finger's broken, but that's so very numb compared to the exhilaration of surviving, of "oh my God that plan actually *worked*," of the wind carding through his hair, shivering as his soaked body is assaulted with the cold, as they're *flying* with what's practically a geyser of water behind them—

And they're *alive, alive, alive*.

Even from afar, seeing Eraserhead fight and getting pummeled is gut-wrenching. Izuku chokes on the *fearfearfear* and bile that rises in his throat, barely being able to hold back a whimper as Eraserhead's head is slammed into the ground by that—*Nomu*, its scream withering, and if he strains his ears enough he can hear an amalgamation of voices into one body. Crimson splatters on the ground, and he can see a glimpse of blood-shot eyes, can head—can *feel*—the horrid crack of an arm being wrenched back, twisted, bones and muscle and tendon tearing, and God, Izuku wants to go *home*.

The Nomu drags his teacher's head up, only to slam it down again.

Izuku can't look away.

His ears ring as the portal villain materializes next to the hand leader. Izuku distantly hears something about being "able to run away" and he would've sagged in relief had his fear not been consuming enough to choke him. The leader scratches his neck, long and harsh enough to maybe cause bleeding, before he pauses.

"...Game over. Let's go home..." Izuku hears, yet tenses. Mineta looks relieved, but Izuku slams a hand over his mouth when he goes to say something, letting go when the shorter teen looks at him with panic. Izuku purses his lips and gently pushes Tsu and Mineta back with his dominant hand, his non-dominant arm slipping the strap of his backpack off and swinging it around so that it's in front of him. Silently, he digs inside the bag and takes out a staff, shifting so that he's covering his peers, back nudging them away further.

"*Move*," he whisper-hisses, seeing both of them minutely flinch. "Move back. Away. Dive down, even, and hold your breath. What that man said is a *lie*."

No villain would just *retreat* after manhandling a class' teacher to the brink of death, after organizing so much of this attack.

And then, the leader looks at Izuku, their uncovered eye a startling, bloody red, hand reaching out—

Izuku blocks just in time, seeing the hand wrap around his staff instead of his face.

Yet... nothing happens.

The leader lets out a tch, looking behind him. Izuku gags when he sees Eraserhead's red eyes and floating hair and the blood that drips down his skin.

As soon as the Nomu even *twitches*, Izuku's already heaved himself up with the ledge of the ground, his staff reeled back into a sure-fire hit. OFA thrums through his veins and into his weapon, the wind whistling as he strikes—

—but he doesn't hit the right *thing*. He's nearly blasted off his feet when the recoil hits the entire stadium, but holds steady, feeling his staff push further into whatever he's hit regardless of whether or not this is the leader. Glass shatters and cracks, smoke billowing into his vision, and Izuku leaps back as it clears. His staff, warm and buzzing and bent, is still in-tact.

His arm is unbroken.

Izuku heaves, feeling the adrenaline pump through him. He glances at his peers, or where they were—there's a few bubbles away from where they should be hiding. Izuku slumps just the slightest.

When the smoke clears, it reveals desaturated navy skin, then bulging eyes, seeping through sharp teeth, silhouetting an exposed brain, and Izuku almost curses when he finally makes out the Nomu. Almost.

Because it's unscathed. It took a fully-charged hit, and it's unscathed.

Izuku feels his stomach drop, hands shaking, and the promise of death settling on his shoulders.

All Might is not smiling when he breaks the USJ entrance down. "It's fine," he says, but Izuku can feel the broken bones in his arm and see the blood flowing down Eraserhead's face and the Nomu standing there and it's not it's not *it's not it's not* **not**—"because I am here!"

And hopefully, *desperately*, he prays that it's true.

As he and Tsu carry Aizawa to the entrance, the man face-up, Izuku leans towards Mineta. "Carry him," Izuku orders, gently setting his teacher onto Mineta's hands, ignoring the squawk of protest as he rummages through his bag. Taking out two golden slices, Izuku munches on one before squeezing the other slice into Aizawa's mouth.

The juice drops steadily into Aizawa's barely-parted lips, and it's hard to keep up with Tsu and Mineta as he's doing this, but his teacher *will* survive. His teacher *has* to survive. Has to, because Class 1-A—including himself—are not *heroes*, not yet, but a bunch of kids new to *being* a hero. They can't take everything on immediately. (The future line of heroes will become child soldiers like Tommy if that happens, and Izuku *will not let that stand*.)

(It's why he doesn't go after All Might when the Nomu digs its hands into his wound, despite his heart screaming. It's why he *can't*.)

"You can't die," he quietly chants, staring at Aizawa. "*You can't die*." Izuku smears the juice on some of the external wounds, like the gash to his forehead and his dissolving elbow, and almost *sobs* when the cuts heal.

When Aizawa's Adam's apple bobs just the slightest, tendrils of steam beginning to seep out of his skin, and All Might *gets up* and *wins*, Izuku breathes.

Chapter End Notes

1. if this were proper, she wouldn't say both over and out 'cause "over" means you expect a reply and "out" means you're gone (thank you @Izzyispoggers on wattpad for informing me) BUT, they've never used military signals before, and it's proly more american, so,, [\[return to text\]](#)

2. for those wondering, uraraka did give izu the golden slice back—she didn't have to use it an' she doesn't like to just. be handed expensive things n stuff like she's a charity case, y'know? not sure when she can considerin how izu is passed out most of the time but she Did give it back. an then izu just kept it. he also took the slices out of his costume so that no one would steal those. also not sure when he could but shhh he jus did jdjdjdjd

his body was also mostly healed when he got to RG's, but she wanted (*made) him to stay because she wanted to double check 'n' make sure he was really okay. and also to scold him for doin something that reckless. and, he was also passed out for a Long time. [\[return to text\]](#)

3. hey, please don't attack me for leavin him in. this fandom's really aggressive about that, an it's understandable, but please,, [\[return to text\]](#)

(edited 9/13/22 6:17 to match with chapter 6, or viridian. there was a plothole that implied that someone else was giving izu burns since bakugo stopped doing so during the training montage.

it's been fixed so that it's just izu havin' a Bad Day. there's also a dissociation moment, so i added that to the beginning notes ,, thank you to *Ghost529* for pointing the plothole out!)

edited mar. 10 2023 13:33/1:33PM

induction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Shouta (unknowingly) first finds him in a small cafe. Tari's Coffee—Shouta's favorite.

It's an unpopular little place despite constantly smelling of baked goods and delicious coffee (and maybe a little like home.) He visits regularly, and because he's an underground hero plus the cafe's usually empty, no one recognizes him. They treat him like everyone else, with kindness and warmth that makes Shouta feel normal. It's an amazing place to be able to *relax* for once, before and after patrols. Oh, and the coffee's out of this world.

The new employee there is... *something*. From what Shouta's seen, Tommy's aggressive yet is loved by the customers. He has short blond hair and a blue eye, the other covered by a navy blue eye-patch. He's tall and seems lanky, the bandages over his arms highlighting that, which is *highly concerning*, but Shouta wouldn't be able to get an answer out of him with how stubborn he's seen Tommy can get.

Yet, his body language reveals a lot. Like how Tommy flinches when someone shouts in excitement, or how his hands have a constant shake, or how he's always in full view of everyone in front of him with constant glances behind him, or when he scratches his arms or pulls his hair harshly when nervous. It's alarming.

He wants to ask, wants to know who and how and *who did this to you*, but he's already seen what happens when someone does. Tommy closes in on himself, his eye dulling, and doesn't answer or deflects the question. What would make Shouta any different? Thus, the most logical decision to not prod and wait, and that *hurts* as a hero.

When Tommy is abnormally tense one day, Shouta watches him even more than before. His hands are shaking minutely instead of worse, oddly enough, but they're shoved into the apron he wears so Shouta could be wrong. Tommy's fidgeting regardless, staring out the window, waiting.

Shouta sees what exactly he's waiting for when robbers burst from the front and crash through the windows. However, he isn't prepared when Tommy, who should be a *regular civilian*, manages to *beat the leading robber* with what the hero can see is *practiced experience*. As if he's fought people before and knows where to hit, how to dodge...

He only gets to ask if Tommy's alright before the police call him over. Though, as he glances at where Tommy's sorting things away, he stores this event in his memories.

Shouta moves with trained agility, feeling his hands flex as he shoots his scarf out and retracts. Dusk is just as quick, if not a little less, though he's only dodging. At some moments his feet fumble, at others he barely manages to avoid the hero's scarf, and if Shouta looks a bit closer he can see how his heterochromatic eyes are wide. (He isn't too sure about the heterochromatic part. Dusk covers his other eye with his blond hair, and the glimpse of hot-pink Shouta saw once could just be a trick of the light.) Regardless, this is impressive—Shouta has night-vision, and Dusk doesn't. This level of spatial awareness (or maybe heightened senses) is uncommon.

Just when Shouta thinks he's got the vigilante exhausted enough, he takes a glowing, shimmering *purple axe* out of *thin air* and *cuts a piece of Shouta's scarf off*. It shocks the hero enough to falter just

long enough, and Dusk gets away.

The hero finds the bit that was cut off float down to him from the rooftop, his hand catching it and looking at the ends. It's a clean cut. The scarf was intertwined with metal alloys.

Shouta frowns. He calls Tsukauchi, because the situation may be a lot more... complex than it appears to be.

Dusk is covered in scars.

His skin is covered in old and new ones, but what's worrying is that the old ones are so... *expansive*. Some wrap around his arms, and they're a sharp contrast to the tone of his unblemished skin, a pale peach meeting warped red in ugly dissonance. What Shouta can be sure of now as he stands upon the rooftop, observing Dusk wrap his arms over and over with shaky hands, is that those scars are most likely not the worst damage he's gone through.

The self-blame that sets itself on Shouta's shoulders, no matter how small, is inevitable. He knows that not everyone can be saved—but to be damaged to *this* extent? To have scars that dark and deep, without a single person knowing until now? Shouta feels like he's *failed*.

So he takes a gamble and asks.

...The bandages that were on Dusk had similar coffee stains.

It's interesting, when Shouta realizes that the problem child uses a bo staff like Dusk during both the Hero Training and USJ.

Regardless of what he thinks of Dusk, Shouta catches him in the end. It's what a hero should do (but is it fine when the vigilante in question has done nothing but good? Is it fine when a *vigilante* has done more than most heroes—has done their own *job* better, even?

...Food for thought for another time.)

Shouta does so during a regular patrol after his injuries from the USJ incident are healed, when he encounters Dusk tying up some robbers, blood splattered on the ground. He's holding an empty bottle, looking at the white liquid inside with a scowl. Unlike most of the other times wherein he observes the vigilante, trying to piece together the paradox that is Dusk, he doesn't hesitate to try and capture the vigilante with his scarf. His aim will never be the same again, but it's still effective. Predictably, the masked vigilante pivots, dropping the object he held—a bottle? Regardless, Dusk's movement, it's... slower.

Shouta frowns, but doesn't stop. It's only when Dusk goes from steady to slipping that his concern rises. He pauses, watching the vigilante sway and sway, movements turning sloppier and sloppier. When he looks closer, his hands are shaking, and Shouta hears the smallest murmur about buying more milk.

...Wait. A murmur? Dusk doesn't speak. Shouta narrows his eyes, moving nearer.

He *definitely* hears Dusk mutter a vile curse before collapsing, and oh, *fuck*, there's a diagonal gash bleeding on his back.

That blood on the ground was Dusk's, wasn't it. God damn it—Shouta curses himself for being so ignorant because Dusk hasn't injured a *single* criminal he's caught too severely, and he has nothing that could cut anyone besides the axe. Even then, the vigilante doesn't use it often, if not at all or on any person. Only the bo staff is seen.

Shouta shakes his thoughts out his head and hurriedly rushes over, maneuvering the vigilante—what the hell, he's so *skinny* and *light*—into a position that doesn't touch his back. One of those robbers must've had a deadly quirk that was supposed to cut deep, but from the looks of it, they only succeeded partially. The hero rips off a piece of fabric from part of Dusk's hoodie, one of the pieces of patchwork, and applies some pressure to the wound. But shit, the crimson's already seeping through, and—he needs to call 110.

What if they aren't fast enough, though? What sort of paramedic would be able to get through these dingy, grimy, twisting mazes that are the city's alleyways? Shouta doubts any of them know where he even is, nor how to get there quickly *and* with the right equipment.

Shouta racks through his mental map of the area. The Musutafu City hospital's a bit far from here, but it's nothing for an experienced underground hero like him.

...There's so much—*too much*—blood.

Shouta takes at least a quarter of his scarf, cuts it off, and carefully wraps it once, thrice, four times around, making sure the bandages are firm but not tight. He takes a shaky breath (no, he isn't concerned for the vigilante) and lifts Dusk up into a careful hold. It takes a bit, to climb up without his hands and without making the injury worse, but he manages to get up and onto the rooftops. Then, Shouta adjusts his grip one last time (while skillfully ignoring the vigilante's pained whimper and weak struggles, even as his heart aches), and darts off to the nearest hospital he knows. [\[1\]](#)

The staff recognize Dusk as soon as Shouta comes in, of course they do; fortunately, this hospital acknowledges more of his good deeds than how Dusk is literally illegal and immediately take him in. The pro hero sets the masked vigilante onto the stretcher they provide, and then they're all off, Shouta following the doctors and nurses as they go into the ER.

He's told to stay out when they get near an operation room, to sit on one of the chairs provided and wait. And that—the mere thought of waiting, of not being able to see if Dusk is alright, if Shouta has failed once more—it's nerve-wrecking.

But the hero concedes, setting his head into his hands, because what else can Shouta do? It's a miracle he's even allowed to wait, because he isn't even one of Dusk's guardians. Does Dusk even have legal guardians...? Does he even need them?

Regretfully, he takes his phone out and dials Tsukauchi. There's... a lot that needs to be considered.

"Did you know," one of the doctors chokes out. It's soon after the operation's been done. Shouta hears the sorrow, the despair in their voice, and braces himself. (It's not enough, in the end.)

"Did you know," the doctor repeats, hand over their heart like it physically hurts, "that Dusk is just a *boy*, and that he's *the most injured* patient I've ever had to deal with?" They look down. "Do not take

that lightly, sir. With all due respect, you are a pro hero and I know you have seen things, but I am a fourty-eight year old doctor, and I've seen horrors you never will. But that—that *child*? He will be a part of my nightmares, what his body has gone through. What I had to *fix*."

Shouta forgets how to breathe.

"You..." Shouta stares in disbelief at the man before him. The police department feels so very crowded, even though there is only him and the detective. "You. Tsukauchi—you're *still* going to arrest him?"

"I—" Tsukuchi swallows heavily. "I have to. Dusk is a criminal."

"He is a *child*."

"...Yes. Yes, he is. But—the law is the law, and it's—"

"No." Shouta pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs. It feels like there are boulders on his shoulders. "No—never mind." He weighs rationality with emotion, something he hasn't had to do in years because he always chooses the former. It makes sense, for Tsukauchi to still arrest Dusk, for Dusk to go to prison. It makes sense.

It feels *wrong*. It feels wrong, because Dusk is a child who probably never got to be one.

Shouta sighs once more and buries his face in his hands.

He doesn't know what's right anymore.

Shouta is able to see the vigilante unmasked once, and once is enough.

Because—because it's *Tommy* laying there, respirator over his lower face, breathing, his vigilante clothes set aside and still soiled with blood. It's the *same* hot-headed, single-blue-eyed blond who'd playfully bicker with customers and make the dark coffee Shouta likes the best. It's *Tommy*, the same Tommy who fucking *works at Tari's Coffee*, someone Shouta sees literally *every time he goes there*.

And under those coffee-stained bandages were. *Monstrosities* of scars, curling and winding and bursting like stars, and Shouta should've trusted his fucking gut because Tommy is Dusk is Tommy. It—he—

Tommy (Dusk?) is probably an abuse survivor or something, someone who knew the dark and grimy parts of this society as soon as he was born and who wanted to fix it, even if by his own hands. Tommy is who may have *needed help*, and he was *right there*—and Shouta, Shouta *knows* the signs, and he. Did. Nothing. For. *Months*.

He does not visit again until he's forced to.

With each passing day since Dusk has been captured, the problem child looks worse and worse. It peaks when he reads something on his phone.

Shouta frowns.

(Izuku stares at the front headlines on the vigilante news forum, eyes unblinking. He knows he looks disheveled, but Tommy hasn't contacted him in a long time, and he hasn't been at Takoda, and—

VIGILANTE DUSK PRESUMABLY SEEN CAPTURED BY PRO HERO

Oh *shit*.)

Days after Dusk—*Tommy* has been captured, the boy, because that's *exactly* what he is, is still knocked out when Nedzu invites Shouta and Tsukauchi for some tea in his office.

"I have a proposition for Dusk," he says, sipping his tea, "when he wakes. I would like you to come with. If all goes right, Dusk will not have to be arrested."

Tsukauchi blinks.

Shouta freezes. He sets his cup down. "What."

Nedzu only smiles with that maddening glint in his eyes.

...There's no arguing with that, so Shouta is forced to agree.

Tommy wakes to bright, fluorescent lights and white, and the first thing he thinks is oh, fuck, he's *so* screwed. Izuku's gonna revive him just to decimate him for being careless. That one wanker with the knife quirk did Tommy in, hiding his Quirk until the last moment when Tommy was sure that he was knocked out. Shitty rookie mistake, fucking thinking that once a criminal's down on the ground they're *down-down*.

And then, that other fucker had a—a sleep influence Quirk, or some shit. He just looked into his eyes and then everything became fuzzy and heavy. The Midoriyas ran out of milk because Tommy took the leftovers so there wasn't much he could do to combat the effects. Prime damn it.^[2]

The second thing he thinks as he sees three faces is that he's *definitely* dreaming. Because seeing the face of a white, humanoid(?) rat (mouse? Small *bear*?) looming over him in Aizawa's scarf, along with Aizawa's face and a random brown-haired stranger's assures Tommy that this isn't heaven. He isn't dead.

It's both reassuring and dreadful simultaneously.

Tommy closes his eyes, because like *hell* is he gonna have to deal with this shit now. Not when he still feel lethargy cover him like a warm blanket, and maybe... maybe it wouldn't be so bad if he just slept a bit more.

So he does, even if that small pinch in his arms *almost* doesn't let him, because fuck that noise.

The next time Tommy wakes, he immediately tries to sleep again.

What? It's the best he's had in months, maybe a year or so. No nightmares, just drifting. It's fuckin' nice, alright?

A sharp jab of pain shoots through his arm. "Shit!" Tommy curses, drooping eye (oh, they let him keep his eyepatch!) launching open once more. As quickly as it happened, it's gone, and he looks at

the white-furred *menace* that gave him the pinch. Because he was so rudely taken out of sleep, he hisses as the light assaults his eye, nearly making him see stars. He can't move his arms over his head because there's—are those fucking needles in his arms?

Tommy, in lieu of a large sling of curses, says, "Wha' th' *f'ck*, man?" His voice is hoarse.

The brown-haired stranger gives him a glass of water with a straw in it from the counter on his side, of which is carefully held to his lips, and *fuck* no. Tommy scowls, snatching the glass out of the person's hand and holding it himself, despite the shakiness of his fingers and how heavy the cup feels. "Ca' hol' th's shit m'self, *b'tch*," he insists, before taking a few sips from the straw to prove it. His throat feels a lot better immediately. "Don't need your fuckin' pity." Tommy keeps his eye open, watching them all warily.

The brunet stranger looks like a detective. Dressed exactly like the ones in the movies Izuku's let him watch. Whatever Quirk they have isn't a visible thing, he thinks, so not a mutation—mental, perhaps? Emitter? Maybe he can transform? No, no—his outfit's too... non-versatile. It looks like it's really just made of normal fabric, and Tommy's had a keen eye for this shit ever since he made his costume. There's no opening for wings or a tail or any other extra appendages, unless it's on the back.

Tommy glares when the human stranger meets his eye. They look away.

Next, the... *hybrid*. They're dressed in a classic suit fit for their size. The type with a red tie and a white undershirt or whatever. There's a scar over one of their eyes, though. Not a chemical burn maybe, 'cause its a bit indented, so perhaps from a weapon. A thin one.

Hmm. The hybrid looks at Tommy with a sharp smile and intelligent eyes—not like Henry's or Friend's, but... different. Tommy's *positive* he doesn't wanna make an enemy with them.

And then Aizawa. Tommy does not look his way. *Can't*, especially because he doesn't have his mask anymore.

"Who the fuck are you two," he says instead, setting the glass down. Tommy only drank a quarter of the water because it could be drugged or something. He hopes it's drugged with sleeping potions.

"I'm Nedzu," the hybrid cheerfully introduces, a paw to their chest. "The principal of U.A. He and him pronouns!"

Oh, shit. The *principal of U.A.*

Before Tommy can think about it longer, the brunet stranger goes next. "Tsukauchi Naomasa," they say. "A detective. Same as Nedzu, for pronouns."

Tommy snorts. "Like I couldn't tell that you're a detective. Anyways," he continues, "I understand you and Eraserhead being here, but why the hell are *you* here, Nedzu? You're a principal. I am a vigilante. You shouldn't be dealing with this."

(...Shit, he's surrounded. One underground hero who specializes in close-combat, another a principal at a definitely high-ranking school. Are there body guards around here? He can't tell; no, he doesn't have to, because if someone from the police force is here, that guarantees that there's more officers around in case Tommy does something.

The room is suffocating. Tommy's head pounds with a headache and forced delirium.

...There's no way out of here, is there?

As panic bubbles in his chest, something immediately dulls it. Feels like a—a *Quirk*, or something, maybe whatever the fuck's being injected in him. Regardless, it makes Tommy stop fiddling his fingers for just a second; gives him a clear mind a little more.

If... If they truly believed he was a threat, he'd already be in jail or something, right? Yet here he is: being healed in a hospital, even with how its walls and the people in front of him make his heart race. So he'll be fine, won't he? He'll be fine.

...Whatever the hospital has him on is—something, if he can think like this without lashing out in a frenzy. Think that these people don't consider him as much of a threat as others, enough to be this close. It might be his saving grace, really, because he isn't too sure what they'll do to him if he fought them right now.)

The principal sips his tea, which. Where? Did he get that from? He says some vague bullshit about explaining later—Tommy doesn't really care since his mind feels foggy enough to not comprehend a lot—right as Tsukauchi asks for a quick interrogation to take place. But can they just... not? Tommy just woke up, like, just now, he's not ready for this shit in the *slightest*. Especially because he still feels whatever drugs he's on.

Heh. Drugs.

"You could just be sent to jail, instead," Nedzu chimes.

(A mask. Cold obsidian.)

...Maybe it's not as bad as it could be, though.

Tommy ponders it. Jail could be free living quarters, as well as food, water, and more, but it's too...

(There are eyes staring at him from across the cell. There is a bloodied potato on the ground.)

...closed. Stuffy. The food wouldn't be that good, either, nor would the water. It'll all be shared or something as well, probably.

Ugh. Let's just get this *fucking* over with.

"Glad to have your cooperation," Nedzu says when Tommy nods, the principal's words a tone that leads to nothing good.

Tsukauchi says some shit about being able to know of Tommy's lies if he says any, taking out a clipboard and a pen before finally starting. "What are your motivations for being a vigilante?"

Wow, straight to the point. Alright.

...Quirks all have flaws. Izuku's told Tommy this who knows how many times. A single weakness, or maybe multiple. Tsukauchi has a lie-detector quirk or some shit. So, what if that's just black-and-white? What if...

"My motivations are to help," Tommy says, nothing more, nothing less. Tsukauchi raises an eyebrow. "Elaborate," he says.

"That isn't a part of the question, sir."

Tsukauchi frowns; Nedzu... smiles. It looks terrifying.

Oh, shit. What did Tommy do?

"What do you mean by 'to help?'" Tsukauchi says instead.

"To help heroes and people."

"How so?"

"By saving, dickhead."

"Saving, meaning..?"

"Helping."

Tsukauchi sighs and writes something. Tommy grins in triumph, because partial, vague truths are still truths according to the detective's Quirk. "Next question. Do you have relations regarding to Midoriya Izuku?"

Ah. Bo-staff, similar techniques—Izuku wasn't really hiding his friendship with Tommy, huh? They'll have to work on that later. "Yes."

"What kinds?"

"Different ones."

"Such as..?"

"Companionship."

"And..?"

"Other things."

"Have you trained him."

"Depends."

"On what?"

"On what training means."

"I—did you teach him to fight."

"No." With the bo-staff, yes, but not with OFA. Only gave advice and shit. If Tommy thinks that he's talking about OFA, then Tommy's technically being honest. And if Tsukauchi's Quirk picks up on that...

Tsukauchi sighs again as he jots something down. It's deeper, as if he has so much to deal with besides this, and Tommy's grin widens because it's *so* much fucking fun messing with this poor, poor man.

"Final one," he murmurs, more to himself than anything. "What's your Quirk?"

Tommy blinks. This is the last one? He thought there'd be a lot more. "Lots of things."

"Such as...?"

"An inventory."

"Of...?"

"Things."

"That include...?"

"Items."

"What kinds."

"Food."

"And?"

"Materials."

"What kinds of materials? How much can your inventory hold?"

"Anything and a lot, respectively."

Tsukauchi looks like he's gonna bang his head on something. He sets his head into his hands instead, pen tapping against his head. "Just—never mind. What else is your Quirk."

"A lot of things."

"Like?"

"Crafting."

Tsukauchi blinks. "What does that mean?"

"Making stuff."

"What does it include, and what do you need?"

Tommy snorts. "Nothing you'd believe."

Tsukauchi blinks once more. An open sign of weakness. Shock, most likely. "...One more thing," he says after a bit, marking a few things down on his clipboard. "What would you call your Quirk?"

Oh. Huh.

What would he call his "Quirk" without revealing too much?

"Minecraft," he says, because no one here knows what Minecraft is. Besides maybe Izuku.

"...Minecraft," Tsukauchi repeats.

"Yeah." Probably thinks the name's bad, huh? Well, Tommy thinks, crossing his arms. Fuck him.

"Alright," the man says agreeably, writing it down.

"If that's all, then you all can fuck off," Tommy demands, because he's *still* fucking tired. But then, Nedzu makes his presence known once more.

The hybrid smiles, and that means nothing good. Tommy doesn't think it ever will. "I have a proposition for you, Tommy Craft."

Tommy just wants to be done with this, so he bites the bullet. "What?"

Nedzu grins, leaning as close as he can despite being wrapped up in Aizawa's scarf.

"Would you like to work at U.A.?"

Tommy recoils a little. Actually, everyone besides the principal does. It's only Tommy who can manage a response, though. "Sorry—*what?*"

"Would you like to work at U.A. as a teacher assistant?" The hybrid clarifies, and what the fuck? That's not what he—"From some... *sources* that I know of, *you*, Tommy Craft, are practically non-existent in any records. You just appeared and applied to Tari's Coffee, they let you in even without identification, and that's all the info I have on you. Nothing of your family or your name, so I can safely assume that you're practically homeless. You wouldn't have the proper identification to rent an apartment, never mind a house. There were a few rumors about a blond living on Takoda Municipal Beach Park, regardless.

"In addition, as Dusk, you are a highly-skilled fighter who deals with blunt weaponry. Mostly. Perfect for heroes in training, as well as for future villain attacks, should they be enacted on U.A.'s students once more. As you are also clearly attentive, you can analyze the weaknesses of U.A.'s hero classes and adapt yourself based on that information, therefore being able to teach said classes how to cover for their weaknesses, both as a whole and as respective students. Then, adding your agility, and you make the perfect person to help with training.

"Finally, if you accept, U.A. will guarantee that you have proper living quarters. You'll be given a rental paid by U.A., as well as adequate food, water, electricity, et cetera. And, of course, a salary." Nedzu smiles with too many teeth. It's menacing, just like the many, many hidden threats he probably has up his sleeves and pant legs. It reminds Tommy of Dream.

"...How do I fuckin' believe you." Tommy questions, crossing his arms despite how his back throbs.

"You can ask Midoriya."

"Izuku's a fanboy. Doesn't count." Aizawa and Tsukauchi's eyes narrow at the casual first-name.

"Then spend a week there," Nedzu suggests. "Spend a week as an assistant, and decide if it's worth it."

Tommy frowns. He may be playing into Drea—Nedzu's hands again, but... Tommy can't do much but agree. Nedzu sounded like he can ruin Izuku's life in moments, and Tommy can't risk that.

"...Alright. Sure, fine, what the fuck ever."

Nedzu grins, and Tommy feels like he's made a deal with the devil.

1.forgive me if this seems unrealistic, i literally do not know how an experienced person would wrap wounds, especially w/ what aizawa has rn,,,,

'm not sure if japan even takes criminals in dirty alleyways, or takes injured criminals to hospitals, nor what happens after the alleged criminal is healed, either. i can't really look up info since i only know english, so,,,,, (honestly i'm not even sure if people in america can be interrogated in hospitals, or what vigilantes are interrogated on,,,,,)

oh also 110 is 911 in japan, i think[\[return to text\]](#)

2. milk cures all side effects in mc, so why not lethargy, too. ,,,, though, it does imply that milk can be used as a technical energy drink,,,,,,,,,,,,,[\[return to text\]](#)

edited mar. 10 14:12/2:12PM

new page.

Chapter Notes

June 30th, 2022: An early update for Technoblade, the one who introduced me to the MCYT/DSMP world. I can never thank him enough for that. Rest in peace.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nedzu and Tsukauchi leave after the principal mentions for Tommy to go to the multi-level parking lot on the fourth floor when he's released ("How do you know when I'll—" Nedzu cuts Tommy off with a snicker. "I have my ways!"), and that's when Aizawa strikes. "Tommy," the hero begins, and Tommy just sighs. He's not going to listen to this shit, because heroes in this world are assholes who don't do their jobs right, so if Aizawa spiels the same bullshit about vigilantism and how he's breaking the law and it's all wrong, Tommy is going to—

"I'm sorry."

Tommy blinks. "What?"

"I'm sorry," Aizawa repeats, and there's more weight to the words, meanings between the syllables that Tommy can't read. He looks straight ahead, meeting Tommy's gaze head on, and maybe that's purposeful so that Tommy can read the honesty in them. "As a pro hero, I know the signs of abuse and trauma, and actively seek them among civilians and victims in order for proper recovery to take place. However, due to how I thought you'd react, I haven't taken proper action, and for that, I apologize.

"Furthermore, on behalf of the heroes that may have failed you enough to turn to vigilantism, I apologize for whatever actions they may have taken." Aizawa bows his head. "You do not have to forgive me or them. You do not have any obligation to do so. All I ask is a chance to prove that we are sufficient as heroes, and that we show you that we can be trusted."

Tommy... *considers* it, actually.

No one's ever been honest with him much, especially adults and authority. Sure, this world changed that just the slightest, but he still only trusts Izuku. He doesn't even have all of Tommy's trust yet.

This, though? Aizawa doesn't know the full story, probably never will, but... it's a nice change. Maybe one that Tommy can handle.

Tommy huffs, turning his head away. "Nothin' to apologize for. 'S my choice." Then, "...Okay. I'll—believe you."

"Thank you." Aizawa stands from his bow, turning to leave. Like an afterthought, he takes something out of his pocket and hands it to him. Tommy blinks—it's a phone number.

"My contact info." The hero states before finally leaving Tommy alone.

Tommy quietly sighs, rolling his shoulders that got tense as he holds the slip of paper. He reaches for his costume that they'd left, taking out a golden apple slice and popping it into his mouth.

This is a risk, giving trust out so freely like he has. But if this place—this *world*—is any different than the DreamSMP, even if by a little, then Tommy will allow himself to hope.

A few days later, when Tommy's fully healed ("I-It's like a miracle! What would've taken *weeks* to heal, has now shortened to days time! You're very lucky, young man..." As the doctor goes on a rant, something about a Quirk or mutation or enhanced healing or whatever, Tommy swallows a bit of the golden apple slice he was chewing on and nods along), he's discharged from the hospital. He barely listens to what the doctor says beforehand—condition is fine, blah blah blah, no medical equipment or medicine needed, blah blah blah, avoid too much strenuous movement, yeah yeah yeah. (He skillfully ignores the part wherein the doctor recommends therapy, and not the physical kind.)

Basically, Tommy's okay, and that's all that matters.

(...How was he even still there anyways? He's a *vigilante* for fucks sake, authorities should be on his ass. Then again, Aizawa didn't turn him in—either heroes are actually kind like that, which is highly unlikely, Aizawa is soft, the hospital lives under a rock and doesn't know who he is, or Nedzu pulled some strings.

"Thomas Mycroft," The doctor says once or twice during his tirade, and oh. So *that's* the cover name Nedzu chose.)

Tommy's wearing a long-sleeved shirt and some pants, eye-patch still on, his vigilante costume and weaponry in his inventory, when he leaves the place and goes up the multi-layered parking lot. There, partially visible, are two people probably waiting for him. Well, there's *many* fucking people outside, but the two men in harshly contrasting colors stand out a lot. Tommy squints his eyes when one of them beckons him over—wait. Dark hair, heavy eye-bags—Aizawa?

The other man next to him, who'd been chatting animatedly about something, whips his head towards Tommy in break-neck speed when he sees Aizawa staring at something. His long blond hair's tugged back in a bun, strands of hair flowing wildly under it. He's wearing a leather jacket over a white sleeveless shirt, as well as some loose pants and brown shoes. A set of box-framed glasses sit on his nose. If Tommy looks a little closer, there's a small mustache above his lips. The first thing Tommy thinks is, *holy shit. This man looks so fucking cool.*

And then the man *screams*, loud and overwhelming like he's *right in Tommy's fucking ears* because the entire parking lot makes it *echo*. It *hurts*, and there's the faint scent of explosions wafting up his nose, and Tommy wrenches his eyes closed and covers his ears as if it'll make those phantom screams stop *wailing*, as if it'll make its transition to Wilbur's reprimands any less harsher, and—*and*—

Calm down—fucking *calm down*, Prime-damn-it! Breathe. Take it easy. He's okay. He's okay! No war going on. It was just a sound, just a yell. Stop being so wriggly about it, wanker.

Tommy takes a breath, or maybe a dozen, and forces his eyes open. Aizawa's moved over to him and looks a bit concerned, which means *very* concerned for someone like him, and when had he even moved? The man's saying something—oh, right, his ears are covered.

Hesitatingly, Tommy uncovers his ears just the slightest.

The first thing he hears is: "—tener I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to frighten you so badly! I was just so excited to meet you and—"

Aizawa's voice overlays it, which Tommy finds much more easier to listen to than the gradually-increasing volume of the ramble. "Tommy?" He asks, not too close yet not too far. "Tommy, are you here now?"

"—never had a teenager as a faculty member before—"

Tommy nods, hands still hovering over his ears. Yes, the loud bitch is talking softer, but as he keeps fucking rambling, his voice is getting louder as he progresses. And then that echoes in the area, which doesn't solve anything, only takes shit back to point-zero.

"Hizashi!" Aizawa hisses, when the man—Hizashi? Gets to a certain point. He shuts up, and for a moment, it's blissfully quiet.

Then, he opens his mouth. Tommy flinches, a minuscule thing, but it has Aizawa narrowing his eyes once more at his companion. "Sorry," the loud man whispers.

Tommy straightens from the crouched position he subconsciously made himself in, soon waving a dismissive hand at the guy as his hands fall to his sides. Prime, his back fucking hurts. "'S fine," he says, a little surprised that he means it.

If he'd been a few months younger, Tommy would've bared his teeth and run off, probably down the alleyways and into Musutafu once more. Or, he would've—ugh—panicked 'til he felt like he couldn't breathe, and then been mad when he recovered. Now, he just feels... understanding? He feels fine.

Tommy looks at his palm for a moment. He feels fine.

...Huh.

"Who the fuck're you?" Tommy suddenly questions, looking up and pointing at the loud man.

He chuckles, scratching the back of his neck. "I'm Yamada Hizashi, little listener," he states. "He and him pronouns for me! I already know yours, by the by—Shouta told me!"

"Tommy In—*Craft*. Tommy Craft," Tommy says, his true last name feeling sour on his tongue. "Or Innit Tommy. Craft Tommy? Whatever—the name system is fuckin' confusing. Just call me Tommy."

...Wait—

"I'm not fuckin' little!" Tommy protests vehemently, because it is the fucking truth. "I, Tommy-*fucking*-Innit, am the Biggest Man Ever!"

Yamada doesn't answer, which, *hey*, Tommy expects a fucking *apology* here for calling him a *child*. Instead, the man just opens the car, sliding into the driver's seat.

Oh. Wait, where were they going?

"You two gonna take me somewhere?" The Biggest Man there soon asks, tilting his head towards the car they're standing near. Aizawa grunts in confirmation; Yamada nods a little enthusiastically, visible even in the shade of the multi-level parking lot.

"Yep!" Yamada pops the "P." "To your new house."

Tommy blinks. *House*? "Not an apartment?"

"Would you like an apartment instead?" Aizawa suggests. "Nedzu can easily arrange that."

Eyebrows furrowing, Tommy considers it, even though he's absolutely positive there's sarcasm in that. He's more used to living in an apartment due to Inko's hospitality and kindness. And he gets to see Izuku often. However, there's a lot of cons to living in one. Not much space for crafting or furnaces, and most likely not weaponry either is one. Then there's other residents in different floors.

"...Nah," Tommy decides. He needs more space. 'Sides, if he's near U.A., Izuku can see him, which he'll definitely be happy with. "I'll stay in a house. Also," he tacks on, "can I get my shit first?"

So that's how Tommy finds himself in their car going to Izuku's place, giving the apartment complex's address. He'd been hesitant on getting in the car despite how fucking cool it looked, but Aizawa and Yamada convinced him to get in. It was pretty cool to see the world pass by when it would've taken hours to go by foot like usual.

The radio's on, playing some music that Tommy honestly can't find the energy to pay attention to. The walls feel a bit too *close* (and it is too fucking dark and no no he has to get *out*—) and his heart picks up as his fingers twitch, resisting the urge to roll one of the windows down. Tommy focuses on breathing, on all the colors that move by out the window. His leg bounces lightly; his eye darts around wildly.

Focus on something else. Focus on—

*—Tubbo and Wilbur and Tommy and Fundy
and Eret and Dream and Sapnap and George
within the cage that is the Final Control Room
as the ~~(forgiven)~~ traitor presses a button
and the gates open
and a weapon
wrenches
through
his
g u t—*

—today. Last night.

Today all seems like a fever dream.

He got unlucky and unfocused enough to get knocked out in front of a *hero*, of all things, and it's the *one day* he has little-to-no milk. Then he wakes, disorientated, to find said hero, as well as a mouse hybrid principal and a detective, looming over him. The principal turns out to be the devil personified, and Tommy makes a deal with him to go to the *one place* where Izuku goes to school and give lessons in turn for a nice life. And now, he's going to get his shit, somehow explain to Inko that *no*, he's not leaving 'cause of her or Izuku, yes, he'll visit, *no*, he doesn't need any more medical assistance, Tommy will be okay, and *yes*, he'll watch Izuku for her. The last part, not in that order, but still important.

All from what was supposedly a normal night. Prime, he needs to train more.

Tommy looks at the two men in front of him. Aizawa looks so tired (more so than usual) as Yamada drives, looking out the window while the latter sings along. The louder man's fingers drum against the

wheel. Reluctantly, Tommy lets his head loll to the side, settling on his left shoulder that's facing the car window.

The blond frowns. Despite the deliberately off-key singing (or maybe that was his actual talent?), Yamada kinda sounds like—

Like—

Tommy snaps himself to attention. "Present Mic?!" He blurts out, and then immediately shuts the fuck up when Aizawa turns to him and Yamada (*Present fucking Mic?*) pauses his singing.

"...You *just* realized that?" The underground hero questions as they stop at a red light.

Tommy sputters. "I'm—*Bitch*—ex-fucking-cuse me for being *distracted* because I just got out of the fucking hospital, just ran out of whatever fucking drugs they put me on, and am now going to get my shit to move somewhere else!"

"Calm down, little listener," Present Mic placates (and he hasn't fucking *denied it*.) He pointedly ignores the "little listener's" indignant cries of "I'm a big man!" to continue with, "but you're right—I'm Present Mic in the flesh, baby! How'd you know?"

Ugh. Should Tommy tell them? How hard would they tease him?

...Then again, many people listen to his radio show. For sure. Right? Tommy can *not* be the only one who does.

Oh, fuck it.

"Listened to your radio show," Tommy mumbles, crossing his arms and looking out the window. The blurs of gray, towering buildings and bits of green foliage here and there whiz by. "While I was livin' on a beach. Found a good radio in the junk, used to listen to it a lot. Your radio show is one of the frequent ones."

Aizawa raises a brow, a frown marring his face. "Living on a—"

"You're a fan of it?!" Present Mic exclaims, giving Aizawa a *look* before momentarily looking behind him to stare at Tommy. A car honks behind them; the light's been on green for a little bit, now. Present Mic immediately yells out an apology that makes Tommy wince, and drives on.

"Not so loud, dickhead!" Tommy scowls, trying to turn his head more to the window. Man, they really make a lot of adaptations to cars for specific types of Quirks.

"Ah, sorry again, Tommy," Present Mic expresses once more, one of his hands lifting from the wheel to scratch the nape of his neck. "I just get excited, you know? A *real listener*, right in front of me! ...And I naturally yell louder, what with the whole nature of my Quirk."

"S fine, man," Tommy says. "just. Y'know." He makes a vague hand gesture. Present Mic nods in understanding after his eyes flit towards the inside rear view mirror.

"Yeah, I'll be more careful," he promises. "But tell me about what you like about the show, listener!" The rest of the ride is in lowered discussion about the show, although Aizawa never stops glancing at him with that peculiar look in his eyes.

Tommy feels safe when he enters the apartment complex and goes up the familiar flight of stairs, all the way to the Midoriya's apartment. Everything hasn't really changed, which is nice.

"Careful with what you say," cautions Tommy when they near the apartment. "Mrs. Midoriya doesn't know I am—*was* a vigilante."

Aizawa nods; Yamada gives him a thumbs up and a, "You got it, little listener." Tommy will let that slide for once, so as to not make noise.

He knocks on the apartment door once, and—

"*TOMMY!*"

—gets an armful of 5'4 teenager almost instantaneously, said teenager's arms wrapping around him and *squeezing* like a stuffed animal. Tommy *wheezes*, stumbling back a bit because holy shit, the twig grew stronger, before slowly wrapping his own arms around Izuku's body.

"What's good, Big Man?" Tommy manages, using a hand to softly pat Izuku's head of green hair. It's crazy fucking soft.

"Stop scaring me like this," Izuku responds, voice muffled from where his face is tucked into Tommy's neck. There's already a small wet patch on the shoulder of his shirt. "And stop acting so casual when you come back. *Please*. You can't just—we exchanged numbers for a *reason*, Tommy. My mom will get gray hairs—I will get gray hairs."

Tommy snorts, feeling his head and shoulders droop a bit, as well as his muscles relax. "No promises," he says; it comes out a bit strained. Izuku must realize this because he relaxes his vice-like hold instead of squeezing harder, the kind soul.

However, Tommy's also made him into a little shit, something he both loathes and delights in. "Tommy," Izuku says, deathly serious, pulling away to look at him dead in the eye but not enough to release his hold. Now that Tommy can actually see him, he looks a bit more... disheveled than usual, with his fluffy hair more tangled and his eyes now equipped with eye-bags that stand out on his skin. Speaking of Izuku's eyes, they're a bit swollen and a little red, but it's honestly a miracle he hasn't burst into tears. Yet. Hopefully never. "I'm going to watch my mom be all overbearing and strangle you with affection until you're almost drained, and no matter how many looks you send me, I'm not gonna alleviate it."

Tommy gasps. "You fucking *wouldn't!*"

Izuku lets go and *smirks*, crossing his arms, the bastard. "I would." Then, he shrugs. "Plus, you deserve it."

"Ugh," Tommy definitely does *not* pout. He does a manly *scowl*, thank you very much. "Must've left too much of me on you. You've gone to a literal angel to a gremlin!"

"Like you aren't one y-yourself," Izuku bites back.

"You *motherfu*—"

Present Mic coughs. Izuku glances over once and immediately freezes, before his hands start waving around, stars blooming in his eyes. "P-Present Mic?! The—The Voice pro hero?! Host of *Put Your Hands Up Radio*?! Standing right in front of my—oh my god I—I have to get my—I have to get my—Tommy, why didn't you—I'm—I look so ridiculous but—*notebooks*—"

Izuku, the poor kid, comically freezes once more when he sees Aizawa. He flushes right to his ears, hand reaching up to ruffle his hair while he glances at anything but the man. "Ahaha," he laughs awkwardly, giving a little wave. "Hi... S-Sir."

"Have a talk later an' shit," Tommy demands, snatching Izuku's hand and making him follow the blond as he enters the apartment. "Mrs. Midoriya! I'm here!"

Something in the kitchen is hurriedly set down, before the soft patter of rushing feet comes closer to Tommy. Then, Inko shows up, a smile blooming on her face when she sees him. "Tommy!" She exclaims, slowing down as she gets closer until she can wrap her arms around him in a gentle hug. Tommy is the biggest man ever known, but he can't help but admit that yes, he fucking melted in her hold.

When Izuku's mother lets go, she's already heading towards the kitchen, beckoning Tommy over. "Come, come," she insists, which the blond teenager can't help but follow, "I made some udon for lunch. And I've already told you, but please call me Inko."

"Wait, what about—" Tommy begins, but Inko's already calling out to Izuku. "Bring your guests inside," she orders, moving to the fridge and taking out chives, uncooked shrimp, and carrots, "I'll make more for them—come and help me. You can help if you want to as well, Tommy."

"Right!" Izuku responds, directing the two heroes to the living room and motioning them to sit. Then, he appears in the kitchen, already heading over to take out some pre-home-made udon noodles out. Tommy doesn't respond to Inko, only moving to get a pot out, filling it with water, and putting it on the stove to boil.

It all feels so... normal. Like routine. Prime, Tommy's gonna be the change that fucking wrecks this—this tranquility, this haven.

Fuck. *Fuck.*

Soon, the scent of freshly-cooked udon makes its way throughout the apartment, along with something a little spicy and with cooked meat, already making Tommy drool. This already smells way better than whatever the fuck the hospital food was. He can barely restrain himself from already digging in when Inko sets three more bowls down onto the living room futon, Aizawa and Yamada having not touched the two already present.

Then, Inko and Izuku settle down, and all of them say "thank you for the food" with their hands clasped except for Tommy. When they're done he immediately starts digging in, forsaking all manners, because holy shit Inko's cooking is as delicious as always. (He wants to stop thinking about the inevitable, too, if even for a moment.)

The moment happens, eventually, when everyone's done with their food and all the dishes are set aside. Tommy can't stop fucking fidgeting or shifting, and then that prompts Inko to question what's wrong, which only makes Tommy's dread pile higher.

Fuck. Okay, he can do this—just get it over with.

"Okay, so." Tommy begins, already looking at his lap where his fingers fiddle with each other. Prime, he's such a coward. "I got a new job." That line grows more and more absurd the longer the sudden silence it caused rings on.

Inko soon brightens considerably, Izuku copying her shortly after, which just makes Tommy wince even further. "Oh, that's amazing! Where is it? Does it have to do with hero-work, because of these two here?" She motions towards Aizawa and Yamada.

"Yeah," Tommy says, voice weak. "Uh. It's..."

...Fuck it. Just get it over with—

"I chose to move out and live a different place for it."

Tommy wrenches his eye shut, preparing for *anything*. He—he doesn't know exactly *what*, but Inko's kindness won't last forever, and all of this comes with a price, it always does, and Tommy's only been another mouth to feed, and—

Oh, fuck, he hasn't told Izuku! Fuck, shit, *fuck*—

No. No, no, no—Izuku, he'll be okay. Tommy's gonna work at his school. He'll—he'll be fine. Yeah. It'll be okay.

Slowly, gently, a pair of arms wrap around him. Tommy lets his eyes open in surprise, only to see the head of Inko's head as she hugs him. Like always, he melts in her hold and gently hugs her back. Then, Izuku joins the hug, wrapping his arms around the both of them.

(In his peripheral, Aizawa and Yamada quietly stand up and leave the apartment. "We'll be outside. Tell us when you're done," the underground hero signs, before ducking out with Yamada in tow.)

"What...?" Tommy croaks out, hesitant.

"Tommy," Inko softly says, "what are you scared about? All of this is delightful news." At his side, Izuku nods.

"Well—I'm—it's just..." He admits, just as hushed, "I've just been this extra mouth to feed. And—and you've just fuckin' accepted me, like it's the *simplest thing to do*. You've worried over me, you've cared for me—you've fucking integrated me into your lives. Me, a practical street rat. Me, loud and brash and annoying Tommy. And you've—you've just accepted me with your arms open!"

Tommy laughs with a hysterical undertone. He feels—detached. So, so detached and borderline uncontrolled. "Who even fuckin' does that?" He questions rhetorically. "Who just—who practically adopts someone just because they're their son's friend? Who provides for them for months only because of that? And—I just—it feels like I owe you. I really, really fucking do. But then I just—I'm *leaving you!* For a stupid, shitty *job!* I'm just—I have a debt unpaid and I am *leaving you two here!* I shouldn't—I—I don't—you should be so fucking *mad* at me for *abandoning you* and—"

Inko quietly hushes Tommy, rubbing small circles on his back. "Breathe with me, darling," she says, "breathe." It's only then that Tommy realizes that his arms are shaking, that his chest rattles with every breath, that his eyes feel wet, and that his voice is trembling. Izuku's tightened his hold ever-so-subtly; Tommy's side is wet where the other teen's eyes are.

Following her, Tommy breathes, in and out, in and out. He focuses on the lazy patterns she's tracing with her fingers. "That's it." Inko says, still rubbing his back. "There you go."

Once Tommy's breathing stabilizes completely, Inko speaks. "Believe me when I say that you don't need to pay anyone anything," she states, resolute. "There is no debt to be paid. In fact, I should be thanking you for being my son's friend when others weren't."

"If you can't believe it like that, then think of it like this: your debt is already paid. How? Because all you've done is make me and my son happier than ever, as well as go out of your way to *protect us*." Inko pulls back enough to look Tommy in the eye. Hers are welling with tears. "If that's not a debt repaid to a mother, I don't know what is. You hear me?"

"...Yeah," Tommy says, clutching her harder and lowering his torso to rest his head on her shoulder. His back aches with the position, but fuck that. "Okay."

"I'm not done," she pushes, but doesn't force him to look up. "You were never a burden to me. Never have been, never will be. Accepting you is the easiest thing I have done because you've made so many people happy. The locals, the neighbors—they talk about you a lot, you know? In a positive way, in a *fond* way. They love you. You are loved. You are no burden. Understand?"

The words repeat in his head. *You are loved. You are no burden. You are loved. You are no burden.*

Tommy nods. He can't trust himself to speak, right now.

"Good," Inko says. "I won't hesitate to remind you of that, whether it be here or anywhere beyond."

With that, a quiet silence falls on all of them. Tommy breathes, and he feels alive, even as his chest constricts and his eyes sting and tears drip down his cheek; but it's more than that—he feels *cherished*.

"...So where will you work?" Izuku asks, breaking the comfortable silence that had fallen.

"It's a secret," Tommy says with a snort. Izuku lightly shoves him, but doesn't pry.

(When Aizawa and Yamada are told to come back in, they don't comment on all of their puffy eyes, and for that, Tommy is thankful.)

It's sort of... bittersweet, as Tommy makes his way to his room in the apartment and opens the door. His furnaces and crafting table are still there, as well as the multitude of chests. Most are closed, but the ones that are open reveal glinting ores. Then, there's the tools and extra staffs over there by his bed, as well as the bed itself, just a mattress on the ground with a bedcover and a thick blanket, and all the clothes Inko bought him.

Tommy grimaces. Can he even carry all of this in his inventory? Usually he stockpiles everything, and that's saved his ass a lot, but now...

"You made all of your weapons?" Aizawa suddenly questions. Tommy jumps, hand to his side for a sword that isn't there. He breathes a quiet, shuddering sigh when he realizes that it was only Aizawa.

"Yeah," he affirms, beginning to take the tools and such into his inventory. By the end, it's like he's carrying a small, five-pound weight on his body. "No one fuckin' sells bo staffs. At least, no one in the area. Don't have a car so I had to make shit myself."

"They know?" Izuku asks, head turning from where he was helping Tommy take stuff down from the other side of the room. "Ah, sorry," he winces, "stupid question—"

"Nah, 's fine," Tommy responds. "Yeah, they know about me. Aizawa's the one who fuckin' caught me 'n' shit. Took me to the hospital an' all."

Izuku makes a quiet "oh," and it's back to taking everything down.

When Tommy has stored all of the tools in his inventory along with the mattress and bed sheets and blanket, with the two pro heroes quietly watching with awe, it's back to the crafting table and furnaces and chests. Tommy raises a hand and takes the crafting table, hunching over slightly due to the added weight. Then, he reaches towards the furnaces and stores those, hunching even further.

"Fuck," Tommy quietly curses, leaning with a hand on a wall. Izuku puts his face in his vision, eyes wide with worry; the blond waves him off. "M fine," he says, "just give me a moment to adjust."

When he can stand straight (or as straight as he can with the weight of fifteen pounds or so on his shoulders), Tommy takes a step forward and goes for the first chest he can reach. This might not work, but this world's different. So he tries to store the chest in all of its entirety, including the things in it.

It works. It goes seamlessly into his inventory, and it makes him double over a bit. Quickly, Tommy takes it out, opens the chest, and checks the little storage hologram—lo and behold, nothing disappeared.

So he stores that one again with a little cheer, and then he goes to store the next, and the next, and the next, each chest making him bend a little more. Finally, he stores the last chest with around three-fourths of his inventory left and the weight of at least thirty pounds on his shoulders. Tommy wheezes with exertion, putting his entire weight on the wall.

"You sure you're good?" Yamada asks worriedly from the side. Aizawa's frowning at him with an analyzing gaze. Still, Tommy waves them off. "Dealt with worse before," he grunts, managing to stand. He takes a few steps forward, all of them a bit slow for his liking. Scowling, Tommy keeps moving until the weight feels normal again. Prime, he needs to carry more shit; usually, he can deal with this no problem.

Now standing at the doorway of the room, Tommy stares at how... barren it is. It's like no one lived here, except for the faint outlines of clean flooring from the furniture that stood on top.

...He'll miss it here.

With a sigh, he turns around. "Time to leave," Tommy states with a tone of finality.

"Have fun, you two! And stay safe!" Inko calls from the kitchen, which Tommy replies to with "Alright!" and Izuku with "We will!" Then, with a quiet click, the blond teenager shuts the door closed.

"Alright bitches," Tommy declares, already moving towards the stairwell. It's a bit slower than he would've liked, with all the shit in his inventory, but he manages. "We're not done here."

Aizawa raises an eyebrow while Yamada looks to Tommy and makes a little "Huh?" Izuku's the only one who has some semblance of what Tommy's gonna do, with what the way his eyebrows scrunch for just a moment before he snaps his fingers.

"Tari's Coffee!" He exclaims. "Right."^[1]

"Oh!" Yamada says, now turning to Aizawa, "isn't that the place where you go to a lot?"

The underground hero hums. "It serves good coffee," he says gruffly.

"Yup," Tommy agrees, feet hitting the wooden flooring of the bottom floor. "And I gotta quit it. Prolly haven't been the best in customer service and attendance, anyway. Oh, and we also gotta go to the mineshaft."

Izuku tilts his head to the side. "What do you mean, 'haven't been the best in customer service?' Tommy, the customers love you."

"You kiddin'?" Tommy snorts as they step out of the apartment complex and near the pro heroes' car, "They don't. *Like*, yeah, maybe. But *love*? Love's a bit of a stretch, Big Man."

"You literally saved their lives during the robbery." Izuku deadpans, lightly poking Tommy's upper arm. "Give yourself more credit." A retort relating to L'Manburg and wars and betrayals is on his tongue, but he bites it down in time. Aizawa and Yamada don't know, not as much as Izuku, and he'd like to keep it that way. So with an uncharacteristic shrug, Tommy lets the two pro heroes drive them to the mineshaft first.

"...It's in the *forest*?" Aizawa asks when Tommy tells them to stop near it.

Tommy snorts. "Duh, bitch. 'S hidden, too, and has a lot of valuable shit in it. So," here he points to the two pro heroes with two fingers, "you two are staying here."

Aizawa frowns. He's doing that a lot. "But—"

"—me and Tommy have been through this forest many times," Izuku vouches, "so we know our way." Tommy hums in agreement.

Yamada sets a hand on his shoulder. "We can't convince them otherwise," he says, clearly the wiser of the two. "They'll be fine, Sho. If they aren't, they'll scream, and we'll go help."

Aizawa scrunches his nose in annoyance, a sigh escaping soon after. "...Fine."

Tommy whoops. Izuku darts in first, shouting, "LAST ONE WHO'S THERE IS THE LESSER MAN!"

"OH, YOU *BITCH*—" Tommy rushes in soon after.

When they arrive to the mineshaft entrance, huffing and sweating, Izuku gets there first, damn his fucking OFA quirk bullshit. He crows in delight and doesn't hesitate to rub it in Tommy's face, and Prime, he severely regrets influencing Izuku this much.

"Fuck you," Tommy says for the nth time, easily relighting the torches with a flint 'n' steel. He moves towards the chests, storing those. No need to store the extra crafting table and furnaces when he already has some.

"You're just salty still~!" Izuku says, grinning, though there's a hint of worry in them when Tommy shifts and adjusts to the new weight.

"You got a fuckin' head-start!"

"Well you know all the shortcuts to here."

"I *showed you them*, and then you *betray* me by using your quirk *and* the shortcuts!"

"No one said anything about not using OFA!"

"You'd use it anyway! Why'd you even use OFA—not only is that fucking *risky*—"

"—like you wouldn't—"

"—but I'm literally weighed *down*?"

"I wanted to assure my victory!"

"I can't even catch up to you!"

They bicker like this all the way back to the car, lightly shoving each other and giggling. Tommy sobers quickly when Aizawa raises a brow and motions for them to get in.

"Tari's Coffee, next," Tommy declares, smiling and breathless. "I'll tell you where to go again." Yamada nods, and they're off.

Following familiar streets under Tommy's guidance, they finally stop at the quaint cafe of Tari's Coffee. It's just the same as he remembers, even when he opens the door and the little bells up top give a little jingle. The smell of freshly-baked bread is the same, and so is the chatter that surrounds him, the background lo-fi acting like gentle white noise. Like Niki's bakery, and times before the wars.

(A little like ho—

No. Tommy stops that thought as soon as it begins.)

Tari herself is manning the counter, handing a to-go cup to a customer with her bushy hair tied into dreadlocks and pulled into a ponytail. The customer brushes Tommy's shoulder as they leave, and only then does Tari actually notice him. When she does, her eyes brighten.

"Tommy!" She exclaims with a grin, walking back to get out the counter. When she does, she looks like she wants to hug him but settles for a firm hand on his shoulder. Tommy lets himself relax easily. "Welcome back, child!"

Never-fucking-mind.

"I'm! Not! A! Child!" Tommy grounds out each word, huffing dramatically and lightly pushing her hand off. "I'm a big fucking man, Tarzan! The biggest to ever exist! I'm literally fucking *taller than you!*"

"Mhm," she easily nods along, waving her hand dismissively. It's definitely not genuine—the nod, that is. "I believe you, kid. Don't worry."

"I'm the biggest man ever, bigger than you Prime-damn-it— "

"Where've you been anyway?" She interrupts, following with, "You don't have to tell me if you don't wanna. 'S just, you haven't been here in a bit. Not that I don't mind, but I—I was just worried."

Tommy grimaces, looking guiltily to the side. "Well, Tari," he hesitantly begins, shifting his feet, "I may have... gotten myself hospitalized? Accidentally?"

Tari gapes at him. "What."

"It's, uh, a bit of a story, but—"

"Oh, Tommy!" One of the customers says in delight, rushing over and thankfully interrupting Tommy's halting, long-winded explanation. He flinches a little and takes a step back, but—oh shit, right! It's the lady who helped make him his eyepatch. Leila's her name; Tommy doubts that's her real name, but it's the one everyone calls her.^[2]

That's maybe the only reason he lets her get as close as she is, enough to see the joy that makes her eyes crinkle. Leila raises her hands in a quick motion but slows her movements when she pinches his cheeks. Tommy blinks, slightly bewildered when she keeps tugging them for a bit.

"Look at you!" She exclaims with a smile. "I haven't seen you in so long!"

"It's been like a week," Tommy mutters, soon grinning back. "Can't believe you've already missed my glorious presence!"

Leila laughs along. "I'm just glad to see you're doing well, in all seriousness, especially now that you have more friends."

"Oi! I have many friends as the great Tommy Innit, biggest man around—you just haven't met them!"

"I bet you do, Tommy. I bet you do."

With that, Leila gives him one last smile, another cheek-pinch, and moves back to her own table. Tari, when Tommy finally looks back to her, gives him The Look, meaning that their conversation is definitely not over, before beckoning Aizawa and Yamada over to the former's usual seat. Izuku has a gentle smile on his face as he and Tommy soon follow them.

As they order a few drinks—a Coca-Cola, dark coffee, americano, and apple juice—and hold occasional, casual conversation, some of the other regulars pop on by and give Tommy a wave, a smile, or even a hair ruffle if he allows it. Izuku gives him the "I told you so" look that Tommy is resolutely ignoring, even when he entertains one of the regular's children. (The dread in his stomach never stops pooling.)

Eventually, the drinks arrive. Tommy grimaces as he hands Izuku his apple juice. "Coca-Cola is supreme," he declares. "The best. Can't believe you'd order *apple juice* instead."

"That's because apple juice is packed with vitamins, calcium, magnesium, and potassium that help your body, as well as improves heart health, digestion, detoxification of the human body, and more. And, it's sweet and tastes good." Izuku sips his juice pointedly.

Tommy stares at him. "Who the fuck reads up on *apple juice health benefits*? And also, Coca-Cola actually tastes like something other than fucking liquefied sugar."

"Language," Izuku says, "there's a child here who's addicted to carbonated drinks. That child being you."

Tommy bristles, because he did *not* just insult Coca-Cola *and* him in less than a minute. Aizawa and Yamada aren't even helping; if anything, they look bewildered amused. "You *bitch*—"

"Nope!" Tari interrupts, placating Tommy with a simple, light bonk on his head. "No verbal fighting over drinks here. Only chill vibes."

Because Tommy respects women he reluctantly abides with the order, slumping in his head and glaring at Izuku. The little shit looks as smug as a cat in a cannery. Despite how she effectively stopped the argument, Tari still lingers.

"So," she says, "what's got y'all's panties in a twist?"

Yamada chokes on his americano, Aizawa setting his dark coffee down with a little more force than usual and patting his partner on the back. Tommy barely blinks, instead giving a short hum to prompt her to continue. She does, saying, "Your auras are weird. Somber. Sorta serious. A bit like... letting go?"

Ah, *shit*. Methodically, Tommy sets his soda down and takes a breath. It feels like the entire shop as gone silent st her words.

"...To put it simply," he quietly says, looking towards the wall, "I'm—quitting."

Instead of silence or anger or anything like that, all Tari does (from what Tommy can hear because he still hasn't turned around) is sigh softly.

"That's it, kid?" She asks. Tommy nods.

And then—

She laughs, not loud and boisterous but quieter and relieved. "You had me worried for a second!" Tari expresses, which, what? Tommy turns, and she doesn't look mad at all. She looks a bit sad, but that's it. "I thought you were dying or something! Not, y'know, quitting!"

"...You aren't mad?" Tommy questions.

Tari tilts her head to the side, dreadlocks falling over to that side. "Why would I be? The customers love you, Toms. They literally adore you. You're mainly the reason some come back here, and then they fall in love with the cafe itself. You've made a lot of people happy, and that's all that I've wanted in this cafe. If you were dying... everyone would be pained. But, if you're just quitting, you can come back, yeah? As long as you visit, even if it's once or twice a month, the people will be happy. And that'd make me happy, if that makes sense."

"Now c'mon," she says, bringing Tommy to his feet. "We're giving you a proper quitting party."

It's late at night when Tommy exits the cafe with warm farewells and snacks and trinkets and promises to visit that he swears to never break. Aizawa and Yamada stand near their car, the passenger seat already open.

Right before he gets in, Izuku hugs him again, arms around his middle. He buries his head into Tommy's shirt. "I'll miss you." He says.

Tommy chuckles, patting his friend's head. "Don't worry," he assures, "you'll see me soon."

"Visit?"

"Of course, Big Man."

With a final squeeze, Izuku releases Tommy and lets him enter the car. As Yamada starts to drive off, Izuku never stops waving at them. (Tommy doesn't, either, until he's merely just a blip.)

"Time to see the house," Tommy quietly sighs, immersing himself in the music that's on the radio.

The house is decently-sized—definitely enough for all his shit, though. It's pretty barren for a house, not really having any preinstalled furniture besides basic shit. It has two bedrooms, a spacious, empty living-room, a fancy kitchen, a basement, and a backyard. There's dark, hardwood floors (dark oak?) but its walls are white, which is a bit straining but pleasing to the eye. A few large windows here and there give off enough light to illuminate entire areas.

It's alright. Something he can manage, at least.

He says as such to Aizawa and Yamada. "It is," the underground hero agrees. "If you need—or want—more things, just contact Nedzu. He'll order it for you and send it your way."

Tommy hums. It's... a bit weird with Nedzu's acceptance of allowing him to get whatever, but it's either 'cause he's a minor (not a child. Just months away from being an adult, really_ that he can create a lot of new shit, or that he's peaked Nedzu's interest in him.

He cringes. Prime, please let it be the first, or else he'll probably not survive if he's in whatever plan the principal has for him.

"You okay? That's a weird face you're making." Yamada comments. Tommy shakes himself out of it and nods, already moving to the basement to put all his chests in. "'M fine," Tommy says. "You can go now, I'll handle the rest of this shit."

"Alright," Aizawa says. "If you need help—"

"Yeah, yeah, contact you or whatever. Go."

Reluctantly, Aizawa nods, leading himself Yamada out the house. And when Tommy hears the car rev up and go, Tommy opens his inventory and gets to work.

After he finally sets the chests down, sorts through them all and then some, and can finally rest, Tommy stares up at the ceiling of his bedroom on his bed, letting himself trace the shadows that he can see with his eye.

Tomorrow, Tommy will help teach, even if in the role of an assistant. Tomorrow, everything will change.

As he closes his eyes and lets himself fall asleep to an easy slumber, he prays it's a good one.

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the rushed ending whajdhgjsdh,,,,,,,,,

1. tommy n izu have prolly hung at tari's a lot, whether it be in the story or off-screen. after all tommy works there for most days, n izu would prolly discover it due to its good fuckin coffee (schoolwork and all-nighters n hero research n all of that) so [\[return to text\]](#)

2. none of the customers who helped tommy in the restaurant had actual names until now
whshdhshda,,, i didnt think they'd reoccur but here we are so uh— [\[return to text\]](#)

edited mar. 10 2023 21:21/9:21PM

rendezvous.

Chapter Notes

i've most likely written an inaccurate portrayal of dissociation; please let me know how to improve it!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy wakes without nightmares, for once, at exactly six in the morning. Considering how he fell asleep at three, it's decent enough. He lets himself bask in the grogginess that blankets his body, his muscles relaxed instead of stiff and twitching like usual. There's no yell on the tip of his tongue, no sweat or fear crawling down his back, no dawning horror that settles like an anchor in his gut—he feels... okay.

Tommy shifts, hand blindly gripping his blanket to cover him more. Nights without nightmares usually feel like this. They were rare, and if they happen, he enjoys them as much as he can. When he'd truly gotten adjusted to this world, they'd lessened a little.

Wait. Shit, fuck—this place doesn't smell familiar.

Immediately the blond tenses, blue eye shooting open and scanning his surroundings. White walls, dark wood floor, no pictures, empty—this wasn't the Midoriya's apartment. Prime, he needs to start analyzing his surroundings when he wakes up, he's become too soft, because where the fuck was he? Who fucking kidnapped him? What do they want? Oh no no no no no, is Izuku okay? Where is he? And what about Inko? Where are they, *where are they*—

A single thought cuts through his rising panic: yesterday, remember yesterday.

It takes Tommy an embarrassing amount of time to remember what had happened just the day before, but when he does, he lets his body sag. He lets out a harsh breath, a trembling hand raking through his now-sweaty hair.

Right. Moving.

That's it. That's literally it. Everything's okay.

Tommy lets his eye slip shut a little longer, body sinking back into the mattress. His chest still feels tight. Breathe. Just breathe, just focus on that. In, out. In, out.

Slowly, Tommy feels himself become stable again. He grimaces when all of the panic is finally gone, eye cracking open to stare at his calloused palms. Yeah, no, he's not gonna be under that sleepy haze for the rest of the day.

...Wait. The day, what day was it—

Oh shit, the fucking *job*!

Tommy's eye goes wide as he practically leaps out of bed, a different kind of anxiety already riddling his nerves. Fuck, how did he forget that? Doesn't he only have around two hours to get ready?

...No, wait, fuck, that's for *students*! They have, like, their uniforms 'n' shit already at their disposal, too! Tommy's like a literal faculty member now! What time do they go to school? What does he even do when he's there? Help the students? Help the teachers? Oh, Prime, he should've asked Aizawa on what to—

—his communicator pings.

Stalling his pacing (when had he started?), Tommy grabs it. He checks the notification; it's a message from Nedzu.

6:07

<rat man> Hello, Tommy! I would just like to inform you that at around 7:00, Eraserhead will take you to U.A.'s grounds. Then, they and the rest of the staff will show you what to prepare for.

Oh fuck, Tommy only has an *hour*?

<biggest man> What the fuck does thta mean

<biggest man> Whyd you use "prepare for" ??

<cryptic rat> Don't worry about it. :)

Tommy forces his fingers to be steady.

<biggest man> ??????????

<biggest man> That doesb't fuckibg help

<biggest man> Tf do i wear?? Howndo i act???

<cryptic rat> Just be yourself.

Tommy stares at that for a moment. Then, he's typing questions as fast as his mind whirls and his fingers can move to catch up. What the fuck does that *mean*? *What does that detail*? Can he just *stop* being on his secretive bullshit for *one second*?

...Fuck. It's clear Tommy isn't getting any more than that, because the principal hasn't added anything to it. He sighs, heading to the bathroom. He could just... wear his signature shit. And his costume.

Ah, wait. Did he even sew it up from the attack?

Tommy plucks it out of his inventory. He grimaces; sure enough, there's a large tear at the back. Yeah... he won't be able to fix that cleanly. Not with his sewing skills, at least.

...New hoodie? New hoodie.

But—fuck, the *job*, he has to start the—*his job*, first.

Tommy frowns, pondering. Speaking of that... didn't Izuku say once, in one of his trillions of intense rambling sessions, that U.A. has a support department? That made hero costumes for the heroes-in-training? Couldn't they just make his? They could make it more durable 'n' shit, with whatever the

fuck tech they have. And they don't know Tommy's Dusk—he thinks. Plus, Izuku hasn't died due to his outfit yet, and he's like the most reckless person ever. (Tommy, the Biggest Man ever, reckless? Why, he'd never!)

...The engineers should be fellow students, not adults. Tommy can trust them. Maybe.

Opening his closet door (holy shit, his still somewhat-sleep-addled brain registers, he has a *closet now*, what the fuck) that's actually kind of organized (??? He must've been real out of it last night), Tommy grabs whatever gets his eyes first. This results in him holding his signature t-shirt that had a small nick near the bottom, as well as some baggy, sort-of dark beige cargo pants that closed in around his ankles and some red shoes with bits of white that Inko bought.

Standing in front of the mirror by the closet, Tommy twisted himself around a little. He looked fine, besides the fact that his hair was now long enough to reach his shoulders. He grasps the ends lightly, remembering that he hasn't had time for a haircut in a bit. Usually, he'd just chop it off with a blade because Niki and maybe Techno were the only competent haircutters, but (*—they aren't here and he shouldn't be, either—*)

Honestly, it kinda looks good. Tommy continues to toy with the strands.

He'll keep it.

There's just one more thing to deal with, now.

Tommy's eye zones in on his arms, where lines and blotches of shades of dull red coat the skin. The scars...

He'll be teaching people a little younger than him. And—it feels a bit weird to acknowledge this, maybe only to him, but they don't know war. They're not like Tubbo, not like Fundy, not like any L'Manburg child nor citizen. They'll ask about them, the marred skin, where he got them when his "quirk" doesn't have to do shit with fire or blades from his skin. They won't let it go if they see the scars. Izuku's different in the sense that he knows about the scars a little, knows what a mental war feels like because he's still in one, but...

They're curious. Even with the USJ, even with how All Might subtly grows weaker, they're... *young*. Young, dumb, bright, and unafraid. Besides the USJ, they haven't really... seen the repercussions of *being* heroes. Of what it means, and how thin the line between hero and villain actually is.

Tommy, too, is young in terms of statistics, but he feels so fucking *old*. Sixteen or seventeen shouldn't feel so aged at all, but he's fought in shit that the students will hopefully never be through themselves. He isn't like them. ^[1]

He starts shrugging his shirt off before he knows it, wincing at the slew of ragged, discolored skin that shifts with his every move. Pausing, one of his hands moves to softly run its fingertips over the skin. It feels rough.

Prime, he feels so much fucking *older*. Tommy *despises* it.

Throwing the t-shirt on his mattress, Tommy drifts towards his closet again. There, he roughly shuffles through the articles of clothing hung up, eye analyzing the sleeves and thumbs momentarily tugging or brushing some, before pushing past and continuing. Most of them were too short or too long, too thick or too thin, not comfortable, not flexible enough—

This one. Tommy tugs the long-sleeved shirt off its hanger with ease, using both of his hands to hold it up. It's completely white which is very fucking bland, so he makes a mental note to sew something on it. Maybe he'll learn how to embroider, instead, because Prime-damn were the designs that one man in Tari's showed him fucking poggers. For now, he has shit to test.^[2]

The teenager slips a few fingers into the sleeves and wiggles them around; it isn't thin enough to be see-through, and as he moves his fingers to run along the width of the fabric, they aren't thick enough to hinder his movement when fighting. Then, he holds the shoulder of the shirt and pulls on the sleeve. It's flexible enough to stretch the majority of the way before it forces Tommy to stop at a certain point. The distance is good enough, even if he would like it to be a bit more stretchable. Finally, Tommy slips his arm into the long-sleeved shirt from the bottom of the sleeve. The texture's nice enough.

The blond hums in satisfaction, soon slipping it on. He twists his body and arms, grinning when it doesn't feel too uncomfortable and plenty breathable. Tommy reaches for his signature shirt and puts it on, grinning wider when it still doesn't feel too overbearing or uncomfortable.

He looks at himself in the mirror again, nodding while his grin dies down and his anxiety flares once more. Yeah, he looks okay.



He checks his communicator. 6:19—he has time. A lot of it. Tommy breathes in, swiftly heading out his room and to the living room, where he knows a lot of his chests are. He's gonna prepare for

anything and *everything*.

Aizawa, who'd come to his house (!!) at 6:57 in a dark gray car and in his hero costume, looks at him once before his eyes go all squinty. "What're you hoarding."

Tommy raises a hand to his chest, his face showing his sheer shock. He's absolutely affronted, he is, that this literal hobo can judge *him* about hiding shit when the man probably does too. But he doesn't say that because he's not getting fired before the job even starts. Instead, Tommy flicks his wrist to get his inventory open and gestures to it, like Aizawa could actually see it. "A lotta precautionary shit," he summarizes, because it's literally just a ton of medical supplies, blocks, and weapons shoved in his inventory that take up every space besides his hotbar. He feels like he's gained twenty pounds and then some, but he'll deal.

Oh, and there's also the bandages, the small burn salve container, the petroleum jelly, the antibiotic ointment, and then some in his cargo pants, but Aizawa doesn't need to know that.

The underground hero raises a brow, eyes momentarily trying to look at the inventory, but he wisely doesn't push. Instead, Aizawa just sighs and motions to the car behind him. "Lets go, Tommy."

Tommy settles in the front seat like he belongs there, and then, after he's forced to put the seat-belt on by the underground hero, they're off.

In general, the ride is mostly in silence covered by songs on the radio, mainly because Tommy's focused on his surroundings and not panicking about the job. The buildings and people pass by, going from small suburban houses and neighborhood roads to towering metal and glass buildings and rushing workers. The car takes a few turns, and then they're moving up a road, surrounded by dense forestry. It winds up and up until—

"Oh, holy shit," Tommy breathes, looking at U.A.'s front in its entirety. He feels so, so small. "*This* is what Izuku goes to?"

Aizawa's already getting out the car, so Tommy does, too, cursing when he fumbles with the seat-belt.

He still gawks at the sheer fucking size of the building once he's out. The glass walls seem to never end, growing higher and higher until Tommy has to literally tilt his head back to look at it all.

(Tommy blinks, and the walls flicker red, lined with gray stone, supported with wood, and he is standing before the entrance, and Sam Nook's gently, slowly grabbing his wrist and pulling him inside with a familiar chitter, a "WELCOME BACK, TOMMY INNIT!"—

Tommy blinks again, eyes suspiciously gleaming, and it's gone.)

...Isn't this like a *Top* school? Less than a zero-point-two percent acceptance rate, or whatever Izuku had said once. There's less fuckin' students. So why the hell's this place bigger?

"U.A. isn't just a hero school, you know." Aizawa says. Tommy startles, head whipping towards the man. Had he said the last part out loud? "It offers opportunities for support students as well as management. Even if a student fails the heroics exam, we give them the choice of going into general education or one of the other departments if we see potential in the scores of the other exams they had taken. And, we give all students the best of the best. Now hurry up."

"...Right," Tommy eventually nods, taking one last look at the whole goliath of a building before following when the man starts to go to the back. They end up at a metal door, which, with a key, opens up to some stairs. Aizawa wastes no time in walking up them, and Tommy follows, eye glancing at the name plates on passing doors in long corridors, before—

"Teacher Lounge?" He parrots the sign of the door they've stopped in front of. Aizawa nods, briskly entering and flicking the lights on. They practically flashbang Tommy, and he groans. By the time he recovers, Aizawa's heading in a specific direction—a coffee-machine, from the looks of it—leaving Tommy to just observe as he walks in further.

For a school that's probably more fancier than it should be, this place is... surprisingly empty. There's just a green couch, a small wooden coffee table in front of it, a stool (???), a bookshelf there, some other cabinets...

Besides some extra shit like tissues, a full flower vase, and a few pictures, there isn't much else.

"You fucks are *poorer* than the students?" Comes out of Tommy's mouth.

Yamada, clad in his hero costume, and who had apparently just come in right as he said that, wheezes. Tommy jumps, whirling around to the man who's trying and failing to recollect himself, if the way his body's now full-on trembling as little snorts escape him says anything.

"What?" Tommy questions as the man slowly un-hunches himself. "I'm right, aren't I?"

"L-Little listener," Yamada coughs, a smile still on his face, ignoring Tommy's immediate protest, "this is a *Teacher's Lounge* for a reason. We don't spend as much time here during school days. Doesn't have to be that fancy because of that, so we don't waste money on it. This is just where we take a break, like to eat lunch or just talk in general. Most of us eat in our respective classes to plan things out, anyway. That's why this place looks bland."

Tommy nods, poker-faced. "Then this place is mine."

Yamada laughs again, especially in the face of Tommy's expression. "*What?*"

"I said what I fuckin' said." Tommy gestures to the room, "You all don't use this place! A fuckin' waste and an idiot mistake, if you ask me; so, this lounge is immediately mine since I'on' have a class." He crosses his arms, a smile on his face. "I've claimed it since you all didn't, so suck it, motherfucker."

Yamada can't seem to stop laughing. It sounds like he's borderline hysterical, but not panicked. Maybe. "That's—I—that's not how it *works*," he says, disbelieving.

"It is," Tommy proclaims, nodding, because it absolutely is now. He leaves his head inclined. "I called dibs so I know, *Ya-ma-da*. Because you can't believe that and are doubting my *authority*," Tommy steels his voice and resolutely does not think of curling horns and brunet hair and—"I h-hereby declare you a *wrongun*."

"What's a *wrongun*?!"

"It's what you are, bitch. Especially 'cause of your banana-lookin' hair; who the fuck told you that was a good idea?"

The man looks to Aizawa for help, who's watching this whole debacle with a cup of coffee in his hands. The underground hero takes a moment to just sip his drink before he sighs, switching to grasp

the cup single-handedly while his other gets his phone out.

"Can I keep the coffee-maker?" Aizawa asks, fingers hovering just over the screen.

Tommy nods, waving his hand dismissively. "Yeah, sure. You aren't a wrongun, for one," he says, "and two, I'm not taking your lifeline away from you. I can make my own, anyway, 'cause store-bought is shit."

The underground hero starts tapping away. "I'm letting Nedzu know," he explains, and Tommy whoops in delight. "Just don't destroy this room in any way."

Yamada just gapes. Tommy looks to him. "You should close your mouth before it falls off, old man," he advises.

"I'm thirty-one!" He exclaims.

Tommy frowns, scrunching his nose and shying away. "Ugh, you're *really* fuckin' old, then. No wonder you don't understand."

"Shouta is thirty!"

"Well, *he* has coffee to keep himself enlightened."

Tommy's communicator pings. He takes it out, his eyes scanning over the message that's appeared. His grin grows.

7:18

<rat man> You are allowed to have the lounge to yourself. Please do not destroy anything, however.

<biggest man> You sre so poggers big man

Tommy shoves the screen into Yamada's face and watches the man's face go all weird, like he doesn't know whether he should be confused or crying or hysterical.

"Beat that, motherfucker," he says smugly. Yamada doesn't get that look off his face, even as his phone pings and he reads something on it. His face actually gets worse when he does.

Aizawa snorts, a once-or-twice-in-a-lifetime thing. "You got the message from him, then?"

"...Yeah," Yamada says, still staring at his phone. He sounds lost. "I did."

That's how a woman, who Tommy knows is named Midnight due to Izuku, finds them. Or, the aftermath.

Yamada's sat on the sofa that Tommy's already moved, looking like he's having a crisis. Aizawa's on that same sofa, sipping his third cup of coffee already.

Tommy's still setting up shit, moving the coffee table and the stool while adding his own twist with chests, furnaces, and the like. He's thrown out the books a bit haphazardly, a lot of them about teaching and research on education and all, but who the fuck cares about that? No one, that's who, because this is Tommy's area now and he says so. Anyway, they're all over the ground, but the blond is nothing but adaptable so it's easy to maneuver around.

He's careful to keep the vase on the coffee table, as well as the other shit made of glass. And with a quick blur of wooden blocks dragged down on a crafting table, he's already made some more chairs and shit, which he'll have to sand and carve and all. That's for future him, though.

Tommy makes a few armor stands, hastily placing them neatly in a row along a wall. He'll make some weapon stands, too, but for now—right, this cabinet's good for medical shit, he can put basic materials on this shelf, some salves here, and—oh, is that a *mini-fridge*? Pog! Izuku had showed him what it was on Takoda. He could store *so* much fuckin' shit in it—

"Hello, cutie," a voice right in his ear says.

Tommy jumps, twisting around, hand raised as if he has a sword. Instead, it's his Clara in his clasp, swinging towards where the neck of an average man should be, and—

A whip hits it with a *thwack!* It wraps around the metal, effectively halting it when one end harshly tugs the opposite direction. Tommy's eye scans his opponent—long hair that provides him with a chance to use it to manipulate their movement, blue eyes, no armor, light clothing, relaxed posture meaning they're ready to fight, teasing smile—

...Teasing? Tommy blinks, and oh, he almost hit a hero, said hero looking at him with mirth. No anger, no fear.

"Shit, sorry," he apologizes, storing his bo staff and looking up. "Don't fuckin' sneak up like that, bi—"

Just as fast, he turns the fuck around, because there's no way that's a fucking *approved hero costume*. No wonder Izuku got so red when ranting about her.

There's a melodic laugh behind him. Resolutely, Tommy does *not* turn around, because he's learnt to respect women even though they were poggers in the first place, and with that comes not staring like a Prime-damn fool. "Ooh, how *feisty*," Midnight says with a sultry voice on purpose, and he can sense her leaning forwards, and Tommy is fucking stuck, Prime help him out of this, "I like it!"^[2]

"Nerumi," Aizawa grumbles. Midnight probably pouts if the "hmp" she makes is anything to go by.

Sure enough, she protests. "Aw, c'mon Sho! Did you see him just now? Oh, and look at how cute he is now!" Tommy tenses when he's forcibly turned around, hands on his shoulders and then on his cheeks, and then they're... pinched? Being pulled? "He's so adorable!"

Is this bitch pinching his cheeks like an old woman?

Wait—

"I agh naght ahing *ahorahal!*" Tommy exclaims, but all Midnight does is coo and lean in close and—

"You are, *darling*."

Oh, nope nope nope nOPE—

Tommy promptly shoves her back, a red flush crawling up his skin as he covers his ears. She skillfully dodges but backs off, anyway, a delighted grin on her face. Oh Prime he can still feel the warm breath on his left, which causes him to push his hands harder. Midnight he can see is giggling at his fucking embarrassment, while Aizawa's most likely telling her to *not do that*, Prime bless him, and Yamada's gotten himself out of his crisis enough to react with a *laugh*.

"Fuck you and fuck this and fuck everything so much," he curses repeatedly, glaring at the woman. Midnight only laughs in his fucking face, the sadist.

"So you're the new teacher's assistant—Tommy, right?" She says with a smile, though her voice is muffled. "Pleasure to meet you, dear. I'm Kayama Nerumi."

Tommy grumbles, "Yeah, that's me." He reluctantly uncovers his palms, scowling when Kayama still laughs at him. "Fuck off."

Kayama opens her mouth, but Aizawa quickly cuts her off. "That's enough," he states clearly, though there's no anger in his voice. More so exasperated fondness. "You know what we have to do."

"Fine, fine," Kayama sighs dramatically, intentionally leaning back Tommy's way. He side-steps; the woman has a smile on her face as she leans back up. "None of you are ever fun."

"The fuck do you all have to do?" Tommy questions, ignoring her.

"Show you around the school!" Yamada exclaims, throwing his arms out. That weird look on his face's gone. Shame; it was funny as hell. "Nedzu had said that everyone would help, but usually, the others go to their respective classes for planning and such; them coming to the teacher's lounge is a rare occurrence. Yet, Sho comes here for the coffee machine, I come here for a snack or some extra water, and Nem's only here 'cause of you."

Tommy hums in understanding. He glances at the mess he still has to organize and sort out. There's still things he wants to craft and place, but mapping out the area *would* be beneficial.

(His eye glances around—there are no windows.)

"Let's fuckin' get to it, then," Tommy decides, already walking towards the exit. His (—skin crawls, breath staggers, hands tremble—) fingers pick at the hems of his sleeves, only letting go to open the door and walk out. He turns around expectantly when no one follows. "Well?"

Aizawa sighs, hand still holding his cup of coffee (but his eyes glance toward him and Tommy knows he isn't hiding well enough). "Let's get this over with." He gets up and follows him out, Yamada and Kayama near, and the tour begins.

The entire thing goes by in a haze.

Tommy greets some of the other heroes, and he follows Aizawa, Yamada, and Kayama to other rooms, down other corridors and through hallways and into rooms only they can access because they have the proper administration keys. He's given one, too, he's positive, but he doesn't remember which of his pockets he put it in.

"So," Yamada says at some point, maybe near the end of... whatever this is. "How was it?"

When he can only blink, the hero elaborates. "The tour," he says.

What Tommy almost blurts out is:

He has most of the building and the surrounding area mapped out already. He knows where the classes in the corridors are, highlighted by the signs in front of the doors. Near them, there's more halls to random rooms, like generators or clubs or other such things. Some of the halls take a sharp

right or left because they wrap around the building. If he goes in those halls and looks out the glass windows, the safest place to jump if needed would be in one of the denser bushes.

If he's trapped, he can run to one of the support rooms. Tommy doesn't know everything about machinery, but—Tubbo and. And Sam Nook—they used to teach him things, a few things, about the gears and inner-workings of their machinery. This world may be more advanced, maybe not with someone like... *Sam*, but surely there are some parallels in their tech. Tommy doesn't know everything about tech, but he's not fucking stupid, so he'll be able to figure out something, activate whatever, and defend himself from there.

The trees around here, some of them are stupidly high. They can provide excellent shade or cover, especially at night. Tommy can easily break the windows and hop onto one from the higher floors and get over the walls, if needed. The glass walls are probably bullet-proof, but if he has to, he'll use the Axe of Peace to break them. No matter how strong the glass is, netherite is easily stronger.

Maybe he can nab some food from the cafeteria on the way. No, Tommy can definitely intertwine the cafeteria into his path of escape so long as he can memorize all the halls, which should be easy enough. He has to remember the kitchen layout and whatever's inventoried there, too, but if he can find something, even if it's raw, he can manage.

Ah, Tommy should start saving some in his area. Snack bags, soup cans, food that will last. The cafeteria has a vending machine, and Izuku's told him that the snack bags inside don't go bad as fast, but he isn't too sure if it has soup cans or canned food in general. Apparently there's a hero called "Lunch Rush" there, making everything with fresh ingredients.

If whatever security measure Izuku had mentioned once takes place—the one with the metal walls that tower over everything—it's still no match for netherite. And when he leaves from there, they'll never find him because Tommy has been running for all of his lives. He'll outrun them like he has everyone else.

Instead, Tommy says, "You all are too fucking pompous with your riches."

Yamada laughs. "This isn't even all of it," he adds, and Tommy's mind takes that as a challenge and prepares to store more info.

"This is all you'll need to know, though," Aizawa cuts in, stoic as usual. "This is only the first day for you."

...Right. Tommy huffs, shoving his hands in his pockets. "'Bout that," he says, "I'm like an assistant, yeah? So which class do I even fucking go to?"

"You'll move through classes," Kayama pitches in, once again startling him, "but mostly, you'll be with Sho. He'll tell you what he wants you to do when the time comes."

So Izuku's class? Pog!

"Ah, speaking of that..." Yamada pauses, taking his phone out, before yelping in response to what comes up on the screen. "It's almost eight-twenty! We gotta go!"

Tommy blinks, nervousness suddenly flaring in his head and gut. *Already?* Shit.

Kayama mournfully sighs, "And here I thought we'd spend more time with you after the tour..."

Aizawa finishes the rest of his cup of coffee in one go like a madlad. "Be prepared." He warns, lowering his cup. The man's already turning around and walking off, too. "They're all a fire hazard, some of them literally."

"We'll see you later, Sho, little listener! We'll visit during our breaks!" Yamada smiles.

"Please, don't."

"Now we have to, Sho!" Kayama insists to Aizawa's direction, soon turning to Tommy with a reassuring grin. "Don't focus on being all stiff and proper, and just be yourself as best as you can, okay? You'll be fine. We'll see you later, darling."

Tommy backs off immediately and sprints to catch up with Aizawa. He can hear Kayama's teasing laugh through the entire hall, and then some when they turn a corner.

He's gonna fucking hate this.

Other students start coming in at eight-twenty-six, just right after Aizawa explains what he'll do during hero training with the class. The first two students are one with red, spiky hair, and another with frizzy, pink hair and yellow horns. They look at him curiously and almost ask for his name, but Aizawa tells them to sit down because he'll introduce Tommy later, so they reluctantly do and go back to their original conversations. They never stop glancing, however, and the predictions about him are not as hushed as they think.

It goes the same for most of the others who file in except for a respectful girl with long black hair, a guy with Optic White Colgate hair—

(There is a scar on the teen's face. It takes up the upper quarter of his left eye, and Tommy can see the scarring reach his ear. It's a deep maroon, edges even darker, and with a little more focus, he can see the light that reflects on the small ridges of the scar.

Tommy blinks, and Tubbo is there, looking at him through his bangs and with his pale eye, blood dripping down his face, mouth open in a scream, and it smells of burnt flesh and fireworks, and Techno, *Techno*, why did he—Wil, *why can't they go and help Tubbo—Tubbo is dying, dying, and dead*, and Tommy was forced to *watch and—*

Tommy shoves his shaking hands in his pockets, tries not to smell the *ashbloodburningfleshdeath* or hear the *fireworksexplosionsdynamitescreamslaughter* or see bursts of saturated color, and does not look at that teen again.)

—and... *Bakugo*.

Fuck, Bakugo's in this class? Izuku's been in his fucking proximity for *months*?

Shit.

Tommy keeps an eye on him, even when he only gets a scowl instead of a scathing insult or a random demand like he expected. From under the desk and in his sleeping bag, Aizawa raises an eyebrow, but Tommy just scowls and just nudges the man with his foot. The underground hero shrugs and goes back to lightly dozing.

The moment Izuku sees him, though, around the time that most of the other students have entered, the blond braces himself as the other's eyes go wide with what seems like literal *stars*.

"Tommy...?" He whispers, a smile blooming on his face.

"Yep," Tommy affirms, popping the 'P.' "'S me, Big Man."

Izuku beams, shining enough that he might be the literal sun personified because holy shit, it's like the room got ten times brighter. How does he even do this?

Tommy doesn't have time to ponder it when Izuku rushes up to him, firing questions at a thousand words per second as his hands gesture wildly. He can't keep up because no one really can when Izuku's like this, just a blur of hand gestures and words and excitement, so Tommy just waits for him settle down.

Fortunately, he doesn't have to wait long. "Quiet," Aizawa's distinct, droning voice interrupts. It cuts off all the other conversations.

Izuku halts immediately, too, hands floating mid-air. He lets them fall, stammering out an apology. Tommy gently nudges him to the last vacant seat by the window by the sixth jumbled apology, which is unfortunately behind Bakugo. Izuku quickly heads over there and sits, but even then, it's like he's about to be an open soda can with an entire pack of Mentos inside.

Finally, Aizawa gets up with a grunt, rising from under the desk. He unzips his sleeping bag and lets it fall, rolling a shoulder with a grunt. "Alright," he begins. "There's two new things."

"One." Here, the teacher lifts his index finger up. That finger moves to gesture towards Tommy, who, when all the students' eyes settle on him, crosses his arms and challenges them all to say shit with his eyes. "This is the new teacher assistant. He'll be with our class most of the time, especially during hero training, but not all the time."

"M Tommy," he introduces himself, scanning them all. "Innit Tommy, or however the fuckin' name system works here. Just call me Tommy."

Then he's being bombarded with questions left and right, pairs of eyes looking expectantly at him. Their voices overlap one another, clamoring to get to know him more. The only thing that's probably holding them back from crowding is the presence of Aizawa, thank Prime. Having all that noise near him would be too fucking loud.

Right before Aizawa has enough of all the racket, a girl with rosy cheeks gasps in recognition, pointing at him. Her comment makes Tommy single her out from the others. "You're the American Izuku talks about!"

What.

Tommy whips towards Izuku who's resolutely looking out the window. "You—oh, you *motherfucker*, you let them all think I was *American*?!"

"I—That was their own assumption!" Izuku protests vehemently, moving his arms in a denial motion repeatedly. "Any time I tried t-to explain, I always got cut off!"

Tommy groans, covering his face with his hands and letting them slide down. Of course he wouldn't be able to because of how meek he mostly is to others. Adding the whole USJ trauma...

He turns to the brunette. "I'm not *American*," he emphasizes, leaning forwards. "I'm fuckin' *British*. Get it right."

She eeps. "Scary..." She murmurs. Tommy will take that as a compliment with pride.

A teen with glasses raises his hand, ramrod straight. "Sir!" He practically shouts, "What will Tommy help us with during hero training?"

"He has expertise in handling weaponry," Aizawa states. "Specifically blunt rods. In addition, Tommy primarily fights quirkless. He, alongside me, will be able to teach you basic hand-to-hand combat, as well as how to use your surroundings to your advantage. And, Tommy will also be able to give you your weaknesses and strengths and how to improve. Finally, he'll be able to explain the natural weak points of the human body, and how to find the weaknesses of others to your advantage."

The class explodes into questions again, all of them overlapping and directed at him and Tommy. It's a Prime-damn cacophony, high and low voices combining to make a wretched noise (not so unlike the screams of war and blood and—) Tommy flinches at all the noise, tense. Izuku looks at him worriedly.

"Two," Aizawa bulldozes on, raising another finger up. His voice is surprisingly loud against all the noise, and it calms the pandemonium fast. "The U.A. Sports Festival is drawing near."

...U.A. Sports Festival?

Before he can ask, the class bursts into sound again. Tommy violently flinches, and his mind is racing and racing and racing. Fuck, what is with this shit?

And a Festival? They're—there's going to be a fucking *Festival*?

Like the—the Red—

(Techno or Tubbo, Techno or Tubbo? Tommy had steeled himself and made his decision, betraying a brother for another, and later on he'll hear the explosions and watch the fireworks and hear the screams and bleed bleed bleed for a nation destroyed by its own creator, and he won't be sure if he was right.)

—Festival...?

he.

He doesn't think. he can focus.

His hands. are shaking. And he feels. like he. Cannot. breathe.

was he ever breathing in the first place? he's a dead man walking. he shouldn't be alive.

this isn't real.

"...okay to have a sports festival so soon after villains snuck inside?" a boy with a thunder bolt in his hair questions. it sounds so distant, so far away. this does not feel real. it isn't, it isn't, because there is no way they are sending *kids* to an event called that.

he should be paying attention, and he is, but everything feels like nothing. he thinks he's felt like this once or a dozen times, mainly in exile, but exile is a mess of emotion that he cannot feel nor understand right now, so he doesn't. the colors far away blur into a mess of blue and brown.

"what if they attack us again or something?"

"apparently, they think of it as u.a. showing that our crisis management system is solid as a rock by holding the event." aizawa responds. tommy cannot turn his head to look at him. it doesn't feel like his. "security will also be strengthened to five times that of previous years."

which is fucking stupid, tommy wants to point out, because even with that, the sports festival could risk thousands of lives if villains do manage to sneak in and do whatever the fuck they want, all on live television. please, please stop it. please cancel it, before that fucking massacre happens, before this symphony is ripped to shreds by its composer, too. please. please. please.

his mouth doesn't want to move. he feels cold. cold, cold, cold. (*cold like exile, cold like the tundra, cold like **prison**—*)

"above all, our sports festival is a huge chance."

"but... but the villains that attacked—that's a good reason, isn't it? it's just a festival for sports."

it's not, it never is, tommy wants to scream and cry until his throat feels like it's shredded. nothing can be trusted. a festival is a sign for a bloodbath, for betrayal and death, whether it be then or in the future so please, *please cancel it*.

"mineta, you've never seen the u.a.'s sports festival before?" izuku asks. tommy isn't sure, because he tries to move his hand to do something, signal something, anything, but he can't.

"of course i have! that's just not what i meant!"

"our sports festival is one of japan's biggest events. in the past, the olympics were called a festival of sports, and the whole country was crazy about them. as you know, with reductions in scale and population, they're now a shell of their former glory. and now, for japan, what has taken place of those olympics is the u.a. sports festival."

how long has it been? how long has the man—prime, what was his name? tommy can't remember. why can't he remember? the man is important, isn't he? he is, he should be.

...where is he? this doesn't feel right.

"of course, all the top heroes around the country will be watching. for scouting purposes!"

"...i know that."

this doesn't feel right. this doesn't feel right. where is he? this doesn't feel right.

he's forgetting something. everything's too hazy to find out what.

he should be in the broken community house with everyone. he shouldn't be in a fucking classroom.

he should be screaming at them to stop—begging, even, to not start the festival.

he can't. why can't he—

"tommy," izuku (?) seems to mouth to him. it's barely in his vision, almost in the mess of color of the background. "are you okay?"

that's a simple question with a loaded answer.

but tommy feels his mouth open, and he mouths back, "i am, big man."

this isn't what alright feels like, though? no, no, no, he isn't alright, because these people are sending themselves to their fucking *deaths*. no, no, no, nothing is okay.

tommy cannot scream.

he drifts.

("...T-Teacher," Izuku quietly asks, not flinching like he'd usually would when all the attention is on him. Aizawa looks at him, waiting. "Can I, uh... take Tommy outside?"

The underground hero raises an eyebrow, glancing at his assistant. His eyes widen in understanding.

Tommy's staring at nothing, and he doesn't look like he's alive besides the minuscule breathing of his chest. And, he's... shaking. Tommy doesn't reveal that; he doesn't *show* that.

"...Okay." Aizawa agrees. "Do you know why he's..."

Izuku purses his lips. "He's been through a lot," he says, already getting up and gently grabbing Tommy's upper arm. The blond doesn't respond as he's pulled away. "Think it's about something you said? He probably won't tell you what it was, anyway."

The teacher hums. "Make sure he's alright. You'll be excused from your classes until then."

"I w-will. Thank you, teacher."

Aizawa watches them leave, before he continues his speech like nothing had happened, ignoring the worried glances of his students.)

It takes a lot of time for Tommy to finally be able to process anything right. Especially that Izuku's just been holding him and ranting about heroes in the teachers'—well, Tommy's lounge, from homeroom until now. He doesn't remember much of what happened in between.

It's a slow, slow recovery.

"...represents charities for the homeless a lot of the time since he once was. Sanctuary has talked about their experience about being poor and homeless when they were younger himself, and he doesn't want others to go through what they went through."

"...'Zuku?" Tommy blinks. His body seems to be upright and leaning against Izuku's, his head primarily on the other's shoulder.

The green haired teen pauses. "Tommy, are you here n-now?"

Tommy shrugs. The immediate movement feels so alien after whatever... he just went through. "I guess."

"That's good," Izuku responds. Then, "Fourth period's about to start, I think. Do you... want to go back?"

"It's... Thursday, right?" Tommy mumbles. "You... have hero lessons around this time."

"Mhm. I won't go back unless you wanna, though."

He snorts. "No way am I being this fuckin' pathetic on the first day for any longer. I—I can handle this shit. I'm the biggest man ever."

"You're not p-pathetic," Izuku says with the conviction of someone who knows they aren't wrong. "You're the coolest person besides All Might. And... are you sure?"

Tommy quietly gasps. "*All Might's* higher than me? That old man? That aging stick? Really? Can't fuckin' believe this—at least make us on equal grounds!"

"Okay, okay, you are!" Izuku's smiling, Tommy can feel it. They rest in comfortable silence for a bit.

"...I want to be there, Izuku." The blond finally decides, gently shoving Izuku away and standing up with a stretch. The shorter teen nods, lightly pushing Tommy back with a playful glint in his eyes.

One last time, Tommy closes his eyes and breathes, before letting Izuku lead the way to the heroics lesson.

Chapter End Notes

1. IGNORE HOW TOMMY TURNED 18 WAHJDHSFJ,,,,,, [\[return to text\]](#)

2. ALSO PLEASE IGNORE THAT TOMMY'S MC SKIN HAS SLEEVES. I AM AN IDIOT AND I FORGOT THAT. SO UH. LIKE. PRETEND HE DIDNT HAVE THE SLEEVES TIL NOW OR THAT IN THE DSMP HE REPLACED HIS SLEEVES W BANDAGES OR SMTH IDK IDK [\[return to text\]](#)

3. **MIDNIGHT DOES *NOT* WANT TOMMY IN ANY SEXUAL OR ROMANTIC WAY NO SIR NO SIR.** it's literally just a part of her personality,,,,, [\[return to text\]](#)

edited 10/22/22 9:07PM

===

I.

Forevermore, I Wait.

It's so *boring* without Tommy here.

The lava trickles down in front of him, the pop of red and orange and yellow so dull. The netherite blocks in front of him do nothing to block the heat—if anything, they suck it in and make the place feel a little more like a cold hell. Then again, Dream can't really feel it anymore, nor can he feel the sharp cold surface of the obsidian. He raises a hand towards the lava, watching its light silhouette his palm.

A clock ticks in his head. He'd incinerated the real one a long time ago, and yet it haunts his very consciousness.

Ahh... Dream lets his hand fall, eyes glancing where Tommy's dead body once lay. He stares at that spot, and in the cages of his mind he can see it like it was just yesterday (or maybe it was. Maybe it was years ago. There is no consistent schedule to his meals, anymore.) Tommy, with his pale skin and long limbs, even paler compared to the obsidian ground. Blood had dripped from the dent in his skull, deliciously red and vibrant—just like him. His remaining eye stayed wide, his mouth in a never-ending scream, and his body twitched ever-so-slightly even when his chest stopped heaving, and Dream had looked upon it for the first time with a maniac grin and he had heard his blood sing and rush and *croon*—

—and now it's long gone. The exhilaration of killing someone had worn out when he'd used the Revive Book and Tommy hadn't come back. Dream sighs, brushing some of his thin, dirty hair from his face.

It's so dreadfully boring here, without Tommy. Everyone else is so very predictable, nothing like the spitfire the teen was. Maybe he should've kept him here a little longer.

Dream smiles to himself. (It widens when he feels the smallest tug on his soul.)

Tommy hadn't come back—*here*. He's just somewhere else.

Dream's smile stretches across his cheeks.

Ahh. He can't *wait* to play their game again.

main dish.

Chapter Summary

class 1-a and tommy meet-up!!! finally

,,, i still feel like this was more of tommy not really bonding w em, but gettin a grasp of who they are,,? idk idk, i just feel like i did less than i should've,, sorry orz

and the characters will also be ooc imo, so,,, once again, sorry,,

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

11:51

<big man> Where tf are yall

<coffee's my blood> The field, one the class used during orientation. Midoriya should know where it is.

"Apparently they're outside at 'the field,' whatever the fuck that is." Tommy relays. Izuku pauses his walk, seeming to shiver due to something—a memory, most likely. He doesn't ask for Tommy for help, nor does it look like a flashback, but Tommy still goes tense.

Izuku sighs, continuing his pace. "Yeah, I-I know where that is. We're near that; shouldn't take too long to get there." Tommy nods, typing:

<big man> Me an Izu are near that

<big man> We're coming over

<coffee's my blood> ...You sure you're fine?

Tommy scowls.

<big man> I am

<big man> Im fuckibg fine aight

<big man> Fuck off

<coffee's my blood> ...Okay.

<coffee's my blood> Do you want me to warn them about anything beforehand?

<big man> Dont ask questions abou waht happened this morning

<big man> No pity

<big man> Dont underestistate me

<big man> *Underestimate

<big man> And for Bakugo

<big man> No explosions

<big man> If he needs a reason it bring sup bad memories

<coffee's my blood> Alright.

"...Tommy?" Izuku asks. He's stopped near the entrance to the dirt field, hand on the door. The new teacher assistant startles, shoving his communicator in his pocket. "You good?"

"Perfect," Tommy replies. "Just open the fucking door already."

Izuku chuckles nervously, rubbing the back of his neck. "You might... not? Maybe? If you're still uncomfortable with them all. Uh—they're probably all in uniform, and I probably gotta be in one, too, so."

Tommy purses his lips. "I'm not a fucking pussy," he states. "I can handle it. Stop—stop mother-henning me. 'S *condescending*, like a Karen." Then, "You're not a Karen, are you? I'd have to ban you from Tari's, as well as ever interacting me again."

"Don't compare me to *that*," Izuku pouts, already moving away from the door and presumably towards the changing rooms. "I'm not a Karen."

Tommy narrows his eyes lightheartedly. "...That's *exactly* what a fucking Karen would say, *Eye-zu-ku*."

Izuku gives him the most distraught look he's ever seen. "Tommy. One, never say my name like that again—"

"No promises!"

"—and two: if I were a Karen, Tari would slam her toy hammer on my head before I could say anything, and you know that I know that *we've* seen her arm strength because she carries a lot of the supplies in the cafe. I do *not* want to put myself through that." Like an afterthought, he looks up and says, "I also don't have three kids yet—or blond hair."

Tommy's eyes go wide. "*YET?! WHAT—*"

Izuku's eyes widen, too, mouth dropping to gape at him, and he frantically starts waving his hands around. "NO!" He desperately shouts, "NO, I'M NOT PLANNING TO—"

"GO FUCKING CHANGE," Tommy orders, opening the door to the field, "I'M HEADING OUT."

"TOMMY, I—"

He closes the door before the *Karen* can get another word out. With a sigh, Tommy shakes his head and turns around.

He was with a Karen this *entire time*. How did he not notice?

Tommy blinks when he looks up, realizing that oh. Because Izuku had yelled in his denial, the entire class is looking at him. But that's fine, because Tommy doesn't need mental support at his side—he can do this shit just fine.

So he walks up to Aizawa's side, the man being semi-covered by his sleeping bag, scanning the man's class. Some of them seem to be shifting awkwardly, clearly wanting to ask something but deciding to stay silent. Mentally, Tommy makes note to give the underground hero an extra-large cup of coffee, or something of the sort.

"...Um," One of them asks. It's the same brunette who called him *American*. "Where's Midoriya?"

As if on cue, the Karen rushes out to the field. He shuffle into his grouped classmates, appearing next to the brunette and the one with glasses. "I-I'm here," Izuku states like they couldn't see that.

Aizawa steps out of his sleeping bag entirely, giving it to Tommy, who immediately stashes it in his inventory. Some students look at him, eyes wide in surprise, and oh, he never told them about his "quirk."

Eh. Let them figure it out.

Nevertheless, Aizawa doesn't beat around the bush when he begins with, "You all are going to start hand-to-hand combat training. Although the Sports Festival is in a couple weeks, prioritizing that you can fight in case of a situation like the USJ is vital. Like mentioned in homeroom, he—" The man gestures to Tommy, "—will help you, along with me."

"If you think you'd be better with weaponry *and* hand-to-hand, move towards Tommy," Aizawa orders, moving away from the blond. "If you think you want just hand-to-hand, come to me."

"If you want the weaponry only," Tommy adds, opening his inventory. He sets a crafting table next to him, "then I'll help you out with that shit, too. You don't have to do both hand-to-hand and weaponry."

The students start shuffling about. Izuku immediately comes over to him, making grabby hand. With a sigh, Tommy grabs an iron staff from his inventory and shoves it in the other's hands, watching the way Izuku's eyes brighten.

"You're training solo, bitch," Tommy declares, lightly bonking his fluffy head with a playful grin. "I gotta teach everyone else. Go an'... try to mimic the movements of pro-heroes you wanna fight like over there." He gestures to his right, where it should be mostly unoccupied for this period. "Mix up the styles or blend them together, but make it unpredictable overall."

Izuku grins, saluting playfully. "Sir, yes sir!"

When he moves off into the area Tommy motioned towards, Tommy finally gets to see who's come to his side. That'd be... pink hair, red hair, floating clothes, the brunette, frog, ear-plugs, octopus, rock head, bird, and... Bakugo.

Shit.

"Alright," Tommy huffs. "Names. You already know mine." He adds, "pronouns, too."

Frog tilts her head. "Say yours too, kero," she requests. "You didn't say your pronouns."

He blinks. "Shit, sorry. I go by he and him."

The brunette is the first one to share her name, more open than the others. "I'm Uraraka Ochako. She and her, please!"

"Ashido Mina!" The pink-haired girl exclaims, looking pumped. "I use she and her!"

"Kirishima Eijirou!" Red Hair follows, equally excited. "He and him!"

"Hagakure Tooru," the clothes say. "She and her."

"Asui Tsuyu," Frog says. "Please use she and her for me, kero."

"...Jirou Kyoka." Ear-plugs murmurs. "She and her, as well."

Tommy hears Bird mutter something; all he can catch is "mad" and "banquet." "Tokoyami Fumikage." Bird soon utters, just loud enough for him to hear. "I use he and him."

"Shoji Mezo," says the octopus. "He and him."

"...Bakugo Katsuki," the explosive asshole says. "He and him."

Finally, Rock Head hesitantly signs, Peony. He and they, please.

Tommy blinks. Before he knows it, his hands are raised, and he's saying, "Whoever wants to do just weaponry go to *my* right, and whoever wants to do both, *my* left." His hands follow seamlessly afterward, articulating each word in JSL as his mouth helps Peony discern the kanji.^[1]

Peony looks like he's about to cry.

In the end, they don't. He's on Tommy's right, along with Jirou, Shoji, and Uraraka. Which makes Ashido, Kirishima, Hagakure, Asui, Bakugo, and Tokoyami are on his left.

"Stay there," he orders, saying the same in JSL before opening his inventory. He gets some wood out, jumping to place a block under him. A few gasps ring out around him, but Tommy ignores them in favor of making a short one-block wall between the two sides. He then places one oak plank block on the right side, and one cobblestone block on the left.

"Right, you're the oak side," he points towards that group. His finger moves to the left. "You're cobble. This is so that we don't have confusion, aight? I'll make something better later."

They all say some sort of agreement besides Bakugo, who just shoves his hands in his pockets and huffs. Tommy nods. "Oak," he says, opening up his inventory. With a tap, five iron bars fall to the ground. Tommy made sure that these were relatively lighter than the usual ones. "Grab these and get an understanding of their weight. Twirl 'em around, toss 'em in the air, do shit—so long as you familiarize yourself with them, that'll be enough." He relays the same to Koda, who's still teary-eyed.

"Cobble," Tommy starts, moving over the short barricade and to their side. He makes sure that the Oak group is actually doing shit before turning to the Cobble group. "Cobble—you all are fighting against me so that I can get a grip on your fighting prowess. No Quirk usage whatsoever, besides for mutations. Even then, limit using them as much as possible, alright?"

He doesn't wait for an answer and points to Hagakure. "You first."

Hagakure huffs, not in annoyance. She walks up to him, taking no fighting stance.

Tommy raises a brow. "You're that fuckin' confident?"

"Kind of," Hagakure simply states. "I do martial arts. Different than Ojiro—the tail guy—in the way that he does aikido and I don't."

Tommy's never had to deal with a martial artist before.

...Ehh, he'll be *fine*. He'll adapt.

"Alright," Tommy says. He doesn't really get into a fighting stance either; if Hagakure's serious about this, she'll know where his weak points are immediately and try to utilize them. Then, he can up the ante a little. "Come at me."

Hagakure almost floors him in the fifteen minutes the fight lasts for. *Almost*, mostly due to a few reasons: she isn't as fast as him, Tommy sometimes catches her off-guard enough to disrupt her rhythm a little, Tommy's used to fighting invisible people, he's more experienced, and her reaction time's slower.

Whatever fucking martial arts she does flows well and is pretty, though. Each move is calculated almost perfectly, easily transitioning from one to another, formless. It's different in how he fights, wild and unpredictable. Hagakure used palm strikes, take downs, and even controls his elbows to refract or stop one of his hits. They also occasionally caught him off-guard, and the lot of circular motions with her arms and wide stances with her legs that could've easily hit him were a pain in the ass to handle—but it works wonderfully.

"What... the fuck's that called," Tommy asks, a little out of breath. He's towering over Hagakure a bit, the invisible girl laying on the ground in defeat with his foot lightly pushing her down on her sternum.

"*Liu he ba fa*," she says proudly, clearly more out of breath than him. If Tommy could see her, her grin would probably be sharp and boisterous. "Otherwise... otherwise known as water boxing. It involves a lot of smooth, flowing movements, and it's one of the... one of the most sophisticated forms of internal kung fu."

Tommy grins right back, taking his foot off and offering his hand. "You're gonna fucking level cities with that and a weapon like a bo staff."

Hagakure beams at him more, presumably. "That's the plan, sir!"

After helping her up and ordering her to get water, Tommy looks towards the others who are watching him with a sort of awe, respect, and fear. One of them—Kirishima—mutters a reverend, "That's... so *manly*..."

Tommy snorts. He asks, "Who's next?"

Kirishima goes up next. It's a bit disappointing when he can't put up as much as a fight as Hagakure, but eh. That's what school's for, innit?

"You charge in when you attack," Tommy observes, "which isn't necessarily bad—on most occasions. Your Quirk, what is it?"

"Hardening," Kirishima reluctantly admits, raising his arm. It suddenly bulks up, the exterior turning into that akin to the side of a mountain.

"That's probably why, huh." Tommy tilts his head, "You're used to doing single charge attacks that knock your opponent down due to sheer force or the texture of your body. Sorry, but that's not gonna fucking work in the hero world—especially with those who barely give a rat's ass about it."

Ignoring Kirishima's crestfallen expression, he continues, "It's far too predictable and open. Brute strength may have been enough, sometimes, but in this more advanced time? You need brain to go with your brawn. Your weaknesses are letting your arms and stomach do all the heavy-lifting, not focusing on anything that may happen to the rest of your body, as you presume your arms and stomach can take all the damage. That can lead to an easy ki—*hit* by the neck, where a pressure point lies, or to your sternum, which can knock the breath outta you, or the back of your knees, which can ruin your balance." Each weakness he lists Tommy gestures, angling his hand to demonstrate.

"Essentially, even with your strength, if your opponent is physically stronger, you are already weakened, or there's simply not someone covering you, you have a disadvantage with your current style." Tommy brutally summarizes.

"*However*, you have brain with your brawn, unlike most people—you just don't know how to use it while you fight." Kirishima starts beaming at him. Tommy can't stand it, so he looks to the side. "With hand-to-hand training, you can easily utilize your Quirk to your advantage, creating attacks that hit, and hit *hard* like a fuckin' truck. With blunt weaponry, you can act like it's an extension of your arm—or maybe a sword? Or if someone like Aizawa erases your Quirk, you'll know how to adapt and do a counterattack. Basically, with hand-to-hand combat training and a weapon, you can make up for most for your weak points."

"Maybe you'd be better with heavier weapons, eh, big guy?" Tommy muses, walking over to his crafting table. He quickly crafts a dull sword, adding a bit of weight to it to make it more like a broadsword. It's made of wood and he's dulled it a lot, so it shouldn't hit too hard...

Tommy moves back over, easily setting the wooden, blunt broadsword into Kirishima's hands. Like an afterthought, he gifts two light iron staffs, too. The other barely buckles with the weight, instead looking at the weapons with awe—oh, Prime, those aren't *tears*, are they?

"Keep those an' practice a little," Tommy says, looking away pointedly. "See which one you fuck with more, like the Oak side. Once I'm done with the rest of your group I'll help you out with balance an' such. Go, uh..." He points to another unoccupied area, "go over there, so that you don't harm anyone. Don't let go of the broadsword if you're swinging it, you hear me? And when Hagakure gets back, give her one of your staffs."

"Y-Yeah!" Kirishima sniffs, moving to the area. He uses his forearm to presumably wipe his tears, and it lowers, his fist clenched in... happiness? Maybe? "Thank you, sir!"

Tommy sighs. "Next."

"You're overly reliant on your Quirk most times because of your fighting prowess," Tommy comments, Tokoyami slumped over with his Quirk, which he now knows as Dark Shadow, of which uses it/its pronouns, limply hanging close by. "I get why you'd want to come over to learn both blunt weaponry and hand-to-hand. Your speed and reaction time needs a little work, too."

He grabs a light iron staff from his inventory and tosses it towards Tokoyami. Dark Shadow, though weakened, catches it with ease, the metal between its beak. "Practice twirling and swinging with this without losing balance or it getting in the way of Dark Shadow." Tommy instructs. "It might seem easy since y'all seem pretty synched—your teamwork is gold, by the way—but getting used to a staff

in your fighting isn't so simple. Since you're more nimble, try practicing a little with Kirishima? And maybe spar? Your vastly differing builds will combat each other, giving you both advantages and weaknesses that you both need to figure out how to utilize and counteract respectively."

Tommy pauses. "Make sure Dark Shadow's alright first, with all the light an' shit. If it can eat and regain energy from food, I have regular apples?"

Dark Shadow perks up. Then, it zooms towards him, making grabby hands at him. Tokoyami's feathers poof out as he turns to the side. "Gimmie! Gimmie-gimmie-gimmie-gimmie—"

Tommy flinches, but quickly regains his composure as he backs off. He nabs an apple in his inventory, tossing it towards Dark Shadow. It grabs the fruit with its beak, swallowing it whole with a delighted sigh, before following its host with a happy little smile.

"If you need more I have some!" Tommy calls out with a grin. Dark Shadow straightens again, but before it can turn around, Tokoyami gives it a light smack on its head. It seems to pout by its posture, sulking by Tokoyami's side as they move away.

"You're used to long-distance shit, right?" Tommy asks, wiping his arm. It still feels like it's wrapped by Tsuyu's tongue...

Tsuyu, who'd been on the ground moments earlier, nods, raising a finger that ends up lightly poking her cheek. Tommy hums in response.

"You're well-versed in that," he compliments. "Your aim's fuckin' insane, and so is your ability to use the terrain to your advantage. Are you good at, like—at settin' up shit or something and waiting?"

The girl looks up in thought. "...Yes," she decides.

"You'll have to consider asking the support department about traps, then, 'cause you'd be damn good at settin' and using them," Tommy grins. "But I'm getting off topic."

"I think you an' Tokoyami would be good at covering each other," he decides, grin fading into a passive, thoughtful expression. "With both of you learning weaponry and hand-to-hand, you'd both be all-rounders. If both of you could cover each other, or work in sync... that'd be beneficial to both of you. Try double-teaming once or twice to see if I'm right, Asui, or maybe spar against each other as you learn. For now, though, try helping each other with balance and familiarizing yourself with the staffs." Tommy tosses a staff to her.

"Right, kero," she says, her tongue whipping out to catch it. Once it's in her hands, she adds, "And please, call me Tsu."

Tommy blinks as the girl leaves. "Alright... Tsu."

"...You aren't used to any of this, huh." Tommy states, looking at Ashido, of which is sprawled on the ground. It... it only took Tommy a few hits to get her down.

She laughs sheepishly. "Uhuh!" How the hell's she still enthusiastic?

Tommy sighs, helping her up. "You seem to hold yourself well, I'll give you that. As in, your center of balance looked good, and you seem quite flexible. You'll be able to dodge easily with hand-to-hand combat training, and maybe with a staff as well... Wait, d'you do gymnastics or whatever?"

Ashido laughs again. "Yep! How'd you know?"

"Your balance 'n' shit," Tommy responds, still thinking. "Maybe... you can try incorporating weaponry into gymnastics? 'Specially as a half-support—like those long pole things or whatever... if we can get you something like that you can launch yourself with, or at least utilize..."

His head snaps up. "What's your Quirk?"

...Ah, Aizawa should've given him a student roster with all their Quirks. Would've made this shit easier.

"I can produce acid from my skin!" Ashido cheerfully explains, demonstrating so with her hand. Her palm secretes a thin, off-white liquid that, when it drips off her palm, burns the ground a bit.

Immediately, Tommy grins, all teeth. He says, "If we get you a weapon that's acid-resistant by the Support Department an' shit, and maybe some gloves that help you use your acid as you punch or kick in battle, you're gonna be a force to be reckoned with." Ashido's smile slips into an O-shape, before it shifts into a bright grin. Tommy barely sees it from where he's getting an iron staff out and demanding her to clean her palms.

Once she's off with the rest of the Cobblers—that's their name now, Tommy decides, because they're gonna clobber any competition with his help—the teacher's assistant turns to the Saplings—that's the Oak group's name, now, because Tommy'll help them into the best fucking trees *ever* under his watch—to help them out.

Well, Tommy would have if he hadn't fucking remembered about *Bakugo*.

The two blonds stare at each other from across the impromptu battlefield Tommy fought all the Cobblers on, waiting. Tommy makes his body as relaxed as possible, but it's hard when Bakugo keeps looking like he'll actually kill him. His fingers twitch; Clara is in his hotbar, and the Axe of Peace is in his actual inventory, but Tommy's a teacher, and he's absolutely positive that teachers, even assistants who work at schools that give their employees too much free-will, do not allow murder.

Bakugo seems to narrow his eyes when he gets into a fighting position but Tommy doesn't. "Are you underestimating me like you did with everyone else, you hypocritical bastard?!" The bitch yells at him, hands curled as the smallest tendrils of steam rise from his palms.

...Tommy takes a breath. "No fucking Quirk usage. And do you want me to go all-out? Make this a fucking one-sided fight instead of a learning experience for both of us? Are you fucking *stupid*?"

Bakugo just scowls at him more and says nothing. It takes a few more moments, but he finally makes the first move; he rushes forwards—pulling a left hook instead of a right, interestingly enough—and the dance is on.

It's a blur of punches, kicks, one-sided taunts, and underhanded tactics. Tommy doesn't focus on what exactly is going on—his body moves to the flow of his opponent's attacks and defenses, his mind subconsciously noting weaknesses and strengths. Bakugo is used to using his hands more than he is with his legs, so if Tommy aims his kick like this, he can knock the other's feet out from him. He is straining himself by not using explosions—moments where he would but remembers Aizawa's warning serves as distraction, and thus, weakness.

Bakugo wants to be a hero, despite using more dirtier tactics as the fight goes on. He is used to the "chivalry" that heroism in this world has. Tommy has ripped that image of "chivalry" and "sportsmanship" he himself expected from his own eyes in the Dream SMP—he knows what heroism is truly like, how it's almost too much like how "villains" are perceived. That, he can use to his advantage.

(If Tommy punches a little harder, enough to bruise lightly, or aims for more vital, painful parts to hit, well. Bakugo was doing the same things as well, so he had to return the favor. It's only fair.)

Tommy kicks dirt into Bakugo's eyes, the victim cursing and forcing himself back. The ex-soldier uses this time to wipe the sweat from his skin, yet his eyes never leave his opponent. His posture slouches as if he's more tired than he seems, a trick to underestimate him. Bakugo seems like the type to be more prone to that, to take advantage of the weaknesses Tommy baits out.

And then—

And then—

An explosion rings out.

Tommy's eye widens, his posture going as straight as a rod, and between one blink and the next he is —

—in...

Doomsday.

Or, the result of it.

Tommy goes cold.

He looks around slowly, eye scoping the desolate ruins with empty horror.

Some TNT still hails from the skies.

Withers hiss across the landscape.

His hand clenches something; looking down reveals it to be... a bloodied Netherite sword.

There is an obsidian grid above his head; an invisible body count weighs on his shoulders.

It smells like ashes and gunpowder, and Tommy knows that the stench of death won't leave his clothes.

When he feels like he can't breathe and takes a desperate gasp of air, he can smell the despair, too.

Tommy stares at the dirtied sword, of which slips from his shaking grasp, and as he tries to remember how to breathe, he—he feels like he's dying, again, suffocating by the smoke in the air, drowning in the phantom screams that ring out, because—because this is all his fault, isn't it?

Like it's always been.

If Tommy hadn't switched sides—

If Tommy hadn't made Techno attached, even by a little, enough to feel betrayal at his actions—

If Tommy hadn't burnt George's house down—

If Tommy hadn't—

If Tommy hadn't—

Would things really be different?

No, no, no— *he can't think about that right now*. He—Tommy's moved on, *he should have moved on*, this was all in the past. He needs to calm down somehow, needs to—fuck, he can't breathe *and nothing he sees is helping him*. It's—it's all old L'manburg's ruins, and Tommy's eye keeps looking *at the grid and the Withers and he can't stop smelling the death and bloodshed and—*

A sudden, sharp pain snaps him out of it a little. Tommy hounds on it, focusing on that throbbing sensation on his legs.

It takes a moment—far too long, for how much of this shit was in the *past*—for him to realize that one of his light bruises from Hagakure's spar is digging into a pebble. Tommy, once he's collected himself a bit more, also belatedly realizes that his body's ducking down onto the ground, hands practically holding himself up.

...Did that really impact himself that much that he fell to his fucking *knees*? This shit was practically fucking *forever* ago!

Prime, Tommy's *pathetic*.

With a long-drawn sigh, Tommy forces himself up on shaking legs. He equips a staff, slamming the end on the ground to hold himself up—this shit is so, so stupid, and he should've moved on by now. Fucking hell.

Thankfully, no one but Bakugo saw his almost-panic-attack—at least, no one's looking at him. Izuku isn't here either, so.

Unfortunately, that also means that Bakugo saw his almost-panic-attack. The one person Tommy didn't want to be weak around just saw him being vulnerable. *Fun*.

"Your spar is fucking *over*," he practically spits, throwing an extra staff at him with more force than necessary. Bakugo catches it with ease, because of course he does! "Go with the others and fuck. *Off*."

"Wait, what the fuck was that about—?"

Tommy turns around, stalking off and resolutely ignoring Bakugo's dumbfounded—guilty?—expression he leaves behind.

"You all getting used to the staffs yet?" Tommy hurriedly questions, hopping over the short barrier and to the Saplings. Bakugo's cursing up a storm or something, but fuck that noise. Anyway, the Sapling's grips are a lot off, and so is their central balance and their footing...

"I—I think I am?" Uraraka says unsurely. Wait—why's her staff fucking floating? "My, ah—my Quirk keeps making it float. Sorry..."

Oh. He hadn't considered that. "What's your Quirk?" Tommy questions curiously as he leans on his own staff, watching the floating metal.

"It's Zero Gravity. If I touch something with my hand—or, all the fingertips on that hand—I can make something have, well, zero gravity."

"...You think you can control the amount of gravity you change? Or can you only release gravity entirely from one object, and not keep it at least a little tethered?"

"A-Ah..." The girl mumbles, biting her lip. "With enough training, maybe I could? But... not now. I've, uh, primarily been focusing on extending my weight limit."

Tommy shrugs, "Okay, then. You think you can eventually handle your staff being weightless like that?"

"Heh?" Uraraka quickly answers with, "Oh, uh, yeah! I think I can!"

"Alright, then. That bein' weightless will probably help you, believe it or not. Yes, if it slips from your grasp, it'd prolly go flying, but it'd also make swinging a lot easier. If you train your reflexes an' agility, I bet you could be fast as fuck. Not sayin' that you should stop worrying about weight limits or whatever; maybe focusing on both would help. Actually, no, it definitely would—if you can lift a heavy fuckin' staff, then that'd increase your Quirk's weight limit, your power and damage when you swing, and maybe even your own physical strength." Tommy grabs Uraraka's weightless staff from her shocked hands, twirling it with slight inexperience (and no, no, his hands aren't trembling anymore, shut the fuck up.) "Woah, yeah, this shit's a little different—if your opponent goes 'n' tries to steal this, and it's like a hundred fuckin' pounds instead, and you suddenly release it? That'd catch 'em off-guard, for sure."

"Oh, and you should probably suggest fingerless gloves," Tommy adds, setting the staff back to Uraraka's hands. "That'd decrease the chance of this slippin' out. Maybe put some iron in the fabric for a good whack, if the need calls for it."

"I—" Uraraka stares at her hands for a moment before looking up at Tommy and nodding determinedly. "Alright! I'll ask for that when I can come to the Support Department!"

Tommy nods back. "Do you want to try long-distance stuff too, or?"

"I think the staff's enough," the brunette replies. "my Quirk needs close proximity with my opponent, anyway."

Tommy nods again, making a small gesture to tell her to walk behind him. "We're gettin' you a sparring buddy an' shit now, then," he says, moving towards Shoji, "just follow me 'til I find the right one."

Shoji's gripping his staff with his dupli-arms, which have morphed into hands. He switches his grip, occasionally, most likely trying to figure out how to hold the staff in the best way possible. Tommy frowns as he watches him, not in displeasure or disappointment, just contemplative.

"...Would you be better with, like... a shield?" Tommy mumbles. Shoji turns his head to look at him questioningly.

Tommy gestures to the other's arms, first. "What else can you do with them? Or are they all just hands?"

One of Shoji's arms morphs into a mouth that says: "Besides hands, I can turn the ends of my arms into ears, mouths like this, eyes..."

Tommy hums. "That'd seem more support-like, right? Not sayin' that supports can't be heroes, but that's why you chose only weaponry." Shoji nods in quiet affirmation.

"Shields can be used like weapons, too, though," Tommy states, a hand on his chin. "They can bash people in better than axe or swords or whatever, especially shitty batons like these. An' they'll give you defense, too, especially if their surface is spiked." Once again, Shoji nods, following along with a sharp eye.

"You can be, like—the ultimate barricade," Tommy concludes. "Your arms—if each has a shield, you can block from a lotta places simultaneously. An' then, because of your taller build, you can easily overpower a lot of people if you tower them, I think. You'd be able to provide as shelter for your allies or partners an' shit, too."

Tommy looks up, "Unless... you want to try an' be a heavy-hitter 'n' use the staff still?"

Shoji stares at him, clearly thinking. Then, his other mouth decides, "...I'll try it."

Tommy nods, giving Uraraka a quick "be right back," before dashing back to his crafting table. He flicks his inventory open once he's there, looking through the icons—not that, that's wood, that's cobble—wait, he needs the wood, actually—and the iron there. He assembles them into a recipe for a shield, swiftly placing five of the product into empty slots in his inventory before moving back over to the two he'd left behind.

"Back," he says, blowing a puff of air from his lips. Tommy takes two shields out, motioning for Shoji to move closer. "Hold one shield for each arm," he advises.

When the dupli-armed teen has equipped all shields, he tests it out, moving his arms and maneuvering around. Shoji's movement and balance are a bit off and a lot slower, but his arms seem to adapt easily. He also moves the shields out of sync, watching how he's shaded by multiple angles.

"So?" Tommy asks, once Shoji seems to stop.

The other's remaining arm morphs into a mouth. "It fits," he says. "But why did you only make five?"

"That's for anything else," Tommy explains simply, gesturing towards the mouth. "You need more ears or eyes an' shit? That's what it's for, so that you don't have to pick up a shield to help out more. 'S not the best in terms of using your Quirk fully—I'd have wanted for you to have all six with shields and still use your other abilities—but it's versatile, innit?"

Shoji stares at him for a bit. Tommy shuffles his feet, looking away.

"...Thank you," he says. Blinking, Tommy belatedly replies, "You're welcome?"

"Uh—anyway," Tommy quickly says, trying to avoid an awkward silence, "do you want any long-distance training or whatever? Like with bows an' shit."

"I don't think I'd be able to use many bows or coordinate my arms well enough for now," Shoji says, "so no thanks."

"Alright then—Uraraka. You can try fighting against Shoji, maybe? He'll be mainly defensive, plus he'll be heavily weighed down. Your agility gives you an advantage here—unless you can't overcome

his defenses."

The girl eeps, surprised at being suddenly involved, before the same steel in her eyes comes back. "R-Right!"

Tommy nods, before quickly heading off to the next person.

Tommy moves in front of Koda and stays in his line of vision at all times, waving to get the other's attention. Once he does, he says, Are you deaf, or do you just prefer this instead of actually talking? I'll be fine with talking like this if you want regardless. Also, what's your real name?

I just prefer talking like this, Koda sheepishly signs back. He'd been messing with the staff a bit beforehand, and it rests on their leg so he can talk. My name's K-O-D-A K-O-J-I. And—thank you for doing this. For me.

Tommy grins. 'S no big deal, Big Man! When I use man it's gender neutral, by the way.

Koda gives him a small smile.

Anyway, Tommy continues, moving more in front of the other, you good with, like. Close-combat, or long-distance? 'Cause I'm more versed with close-combat—you know, these staffs and all—but I know how to shoot a bow or a crossbow, if that's more for you...? I could also try to remember other long-distance weapons an' shit.

It'd also be more difficult to find a bow anywhere in the world... Tommy frowns, thinking. The whole point of this shit is so that you can fight back whenever, even if your Quirk is disabled or your gear's destroyed or some shit. You could just... learn how to throw things? Like—like knives, an' shit, unless you don't want that.

Koda looks down, clearly contemplating his words. It feels like hours, Tommy seriously contemplating whether or not Koda really wants a weapon—or to even fight at all—before his weary, nervous face turns into one of determination, not unlike Uraraka's. I'd like to do archery—with the crossbow specifically, he soon requests, along with some close-combat. Uh—with these staffs.

Alright, Tommy nods. Give me a moment to make the crossbow an' shit. He walks unhurriedly to his crafting table, momentarily distracted by watching the Cobblers, Shoji and Uraraka, and Izuku to make sure they're fairing well.

...What the fuck. Izuku's bouncing off the trees like a Prime-damn *Pong ball*, using his staff to propel himself faster with the tiniest hint of OFA—and it looks like it's actually fucking *working*. It looks like teleportation! OFA's *bullshit*. Tommy shakes his head, continuing on his way.

Finally at his destination, he opens his inventory and crafts a tripwire hook—man, he's using more materials than he thought today—before beginning to make a crossbow.

He pauses. Plucking some more bandages from his inventory, Tommy rips a part off before dividing that scrap into bits of string. He idly plays with the result for a bit before plugging the string into his inventory and then the crafting table, grinning madly at the light crossbow icon that pops up on the hologram. Putting that into his inventory, he finally takes it out, and his grin seems to grow impossibly wider as he mock-shoots the beauty.

Wait—does he have flint for the arrows? Or feathers?

...How's he gonna get *feathers*? There's like... no wild chickens in this place. (Momentarily, he feels discordant from the world, because this—this isn't a war-riddled server, but it's damaged nonetheless, and Tommy doesn't belong here, doesn't he?)

Shit.

Tommy slumps. Ahh, he'll bring Koda the crossbow anyway, because why the fuck not? They'll get a grip on its weight before they actually start shooting; and, he needs to learn how to wield the staff, too.

Aizawa, from the other side of the field and probably resting, looks at him with wide eyes. What are you doing now, he signs.

Tommy fakes a dramatic gasp. How dare you assume I'm always doing bad shit! He exclaims, his signing more forceful. I mean, I'm always doing shit, but it's not always bad! Anyway, no, I'm not killing anyone with this or anything. Peony wanted to try long-distance, I suggested this baby, they said they'd try, and here I am. Can't even make arrows, too.

Aizawa narrows his eyes more. Tommy does his best glare at the man, inclining his head.

Finally, the man sighs, breaking the staring contest. Don't hurt anyone, and make sure Peony doesn't either. Tommy silently whoops and gleefully makes his way back to Koda, crossbow in hand.

"Here," Tommy suddenly holds the crossbow near Koda once he's near them. The other startles, blinking rapidly at him as he turns around. Eventually, they grab the weapon with delicacy. I can't make arrows right now 'cause I need feathers and flint, Tommy says, so you'll only have the actual thing to test out and no ammo. If you don't like the way it feels or some shit, tell me and I'll keep it.

Koda nods absentmindedly, still staring at the weapon with a quiet awe. He hesitantly tucks it under their armpit before bowing repeatedly to Tommy, signing, Thank you so much, Gladiolus! I'll do my best to learn how to use this!

Tommy blinks. Gladiolus?

...Wait, Koda adds before he can think about it further, you need feathers, right?

Tommy blinks. ...Yeah?

Koda fidgets with his fingers nervously, as if they wanted to do something. In the end, he didn't. ...Never mind, sorry.

Alright...? Tommy frowns. Make sure you practice with the staff, still. You can't get used to a crossbow only.

Koda brightens again, giving him a small smile.

Tommy nods, before moving on, keeping the slightly-weird interaction in the back of his mind—relevant, but not high priority. One more person.

Jirou's got one of her ear-plugs in her metal staff, her face scrunched in concentration. Tommy looks at the staff curiously, seeing it tremble slightly.

"The fuck're you doing?" He asks, startling her. Her aux-plugs rise, pointed at him, so Tommy raises his hands placatingly.

"...Oh," Jirou sighs, her ear-plugs lowering and her tense shoulders relaxing. "S-Sorry. I got startled."

"S fine," Tommy replies. "Wasn't sure how to get your attention anyway—'s my bad. Why was your ear in the fuckin' staff, though?"

Jirou glances down at the metal staff, a neat hole punctured on the end facing the sky. "Well, my Quirk is like headphones that are connected to my heartbeat; I can transmit sound through them. When you gave me this, I immediately thought about how sound is faster through metal than air. So, maybe the staff could amplify my Quirk's power or spread its influence?"

"Either way," she says, picking it up to twirl it between her fingers. She's experienced. "If I can connect my headphone jacks into this at the right time while I fight with it... I can make a pretty targeted vibration that'll hurt."

Tommy blinks. "So sound's faster through this shit?"^[2]

"...You didn't know that?"

"O-Of course I did!" Tommy states, crossing his arms, "I just—y'know, I wanted to see if I could think of a use for that shit."

...Actually. "If..." Tommy puts a hand to his chin, "What if I made the staff like an outlet?" When Jirou looks at him questioningly, he restates, "Wires an' shit—they have, like. Three—spikes? They have the three points on 'em, 'n' those have to be there for a reason. Maybe they help electricity get through? And... electricity's like sound in the way it flows, right?" If he was remembering—remembering Wil's old lessons correctly.

He probably wasn't. It'd been so long ago, after all. (And, well—Wil was happy, back then. It hurts to remember that.)

"Plus, maybe it'd transfer to the ground easier." Izuku had showed him many hero videos, including Present Mic's—well, Yamada's. He'd barely paid them interest, but there were some things he took a keen eye on, especially weaknesses—like how Present Mic's scream seemed to... bounce off dirt grounds.

"...Huh." Jirou murmurs, staring at the staff again. "Maybe it would; sound *can* be converted into electricity, after all. If I added a transducer to my costume, or in the staff..."

Tommy's eye widens. No way in hell did him bullshitting everything fucking *work*.

"Thanks," Jirou says, giving him a smile.

Tommy fake it 'til he fucking makes it, putting up a grin himself and nodding. "I'll go help the others out, now—unless you need anything...?"

"Nah, I'll be fine," she says. "I've had a little experience due to me watching videos online, so I should be better off."

"Alright; if you say so." Tommy moves away, checking his communicator—ah, the period's almost ending. He did a great job, for his first day; at least, in his opinion.

As he puts his crafting table away and watches Aizawa round up everyone, Tommy himself having to get Izuku, he thinks that he might just be fine, being here for a little.

Chapter End Notes

1. this was a change long overdue, but people (or maybe just jsl) use other words to represent them instead of spelling out kanji like i originally did. in hanakotoba, or japanese flower symbolism, peonies basically mean bravery. outside of hanakotoba, gladiolus', as tommy will be dubbed, mean strength

apparently mouthing discerns different kanji. as dusk, tommy's face is covered by a mask—thus, that creates a plothole in which aizawa is able to understand him during his meeting with dusk perfectly n such. i'll prolly make an edit wherein it takes him a bit to discern tommy's message, or perhaps make them use asl instead, whasdhgsh,,,, apologies [\[return to text\]](#)

2. tommy's never been to actual school in my headcanons. he's jus been w phil n techno n wil n tubbo as his only instructors, homeschooled from there an stuff. most of what he knows is from them wajhdghahjdg,,,,, [\[return to text\]](#)

if yall are worried abt koda thinkin abt doin smth bad, he isn't!!!! he wouldn't kill any animal ever, he's just shy abt using his quirk an stuff or talking abt it due to ✨Insecurities✨

oh!! the reason why tommy doesn't exactly show his students how to wield their weapons js 'cause he's new to teaching. handling two groups of different students of which all wpuld probably have different fighting styles or weapons in one high school period?? on his first day on the job????? AND after an almost-panic-attack half the time ?????????? that's a lot

cold open.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Lunch time arrives after fourth period; essentially, it's Tommy's break time. He's decided to hang out a little in Class 1-A's room before he goes and eats something, just leaning on the wall—apparently Lunch Rush's food is good? He'll have to try it.

...Wonder if they make drinks, too; specifically tea. Maybe there's curry.^[1]

After Uraraka's sudden energy about the Sports Festival, Tommy perks his head up. He finally bites the bullet and asks, "What's the uh—what's the Sports Festival like?" He says it pretty softly, in his opinion, but everyone's heads still turn toward him. His hands do not twitch under their gazes, because this is not the ruins of the Community House and he is not so used to living in tundras anymore.

"You..." Ashido slowly begins, "you don't know what the Sports Festival is?"

"Well I do, of course," Tommy blatantly lies, "but what's it like? I've never watched it or anythin', I just know the general concept." Hopefully, Aizawa, Yamada, or Kayama will tell him about it later. "Plus, I'm foreign."

"It's rare for someone to not know the U.A. Sports Festival regardless!" Iida immediately states, waving his hands like he's karate-chopping the very air.

"I'll have you know that I was busy—" Fighting a war or three. "—having a life, thank you very—"

"After all," the other overrides, "it's a country-wide event in Japan that is also streamed in other countries! Due to this, the environment is heavily packed with people in a stadium. Students of all classes will be battling in the middle of the stadium, but there may also be other things such as an obstacle course or a teamwork event, so television screens are above the audience! Overall, it allows every U.A. student to showcase their Quirks, so it will be extremely battle-heavy, whether it be physical or not. There are also snack and drink vendors littered about."

...Oh.

"Uhuh," Tommy nods, like his hands aren't shaking and his heart isn't racing, "alright. I get it now. So that's why it's called the 'Sports Festival,' huh?"

"If you're worried about us getting injured or anything," Izuku chimes in, giving him a knowing look, "don't worry! We have Recovery Girl here, so." Tommy distantly connects the name with the person Izuku mentioned that had healed him after the Entrance Exam. His hands tremble a little less.

Tommy nods again when everyone else vouches for Recovery Girl's experience in healing, acutely aware of the cold feeling that curls in his gut, just like the USJ.

He doesn't believe any of them.

Once again, Uraraka suddenly cheers menacingly, raising a fist to the air and rallying everyone else. Sighing, Tommy stretches a little. They're probably gonna keep cheering for a while longer, so he's

gonna go eat.

Oh, wait.

He moves towards Koda instead, waving to get the other's attention. If you need space because the cafeteria's too loud, he mentions, you can come to the teacher's lounge. It's not actually that anymore because I claimed it, but yeah. I'll probably be in there, but no one else will unless they're like a teacher or some shit.

Tommy's only offered that because Koda seems either constipated or the personification of anxiety most of the time. Right now is not one of those moments, though, as a rare smile spreads on the other's face, soft on their blockish features. Okay! Thank you!

Tommy nods back. With that, he strides out the classroom, ignoring anyone who's looking at him curiously.

When he gets lunch and goes to the teacher's lounge—Lunch Rush makes some damn-good curry, but because of long-lasting starvation effects he can't have more than a plate—the first thing Tommy does is go to the crafting table to replace the signs outside. Now, they read "Tommy Innit's Territory," and the wood's ugly on the polished—whatever the original sign is, but what-the-fuck-ever, those who don't like it can go and fuck off or whine like a bitch for all he cares. He isn't changing it.

Though, besides Koda who Tommy allowed entry to about ten minutes after lunch time had started, there was a large figure standing outside for a few. They'd worn a suit, and Tommy had leaned over a little to see them more, but they'd already moved on.

Eh. Tommy takes another bite of his curry, savoring the taste as he basks in his and Koda's silence. If they didn't need him, then they didn't need him. ^[2]

"...What the shit," Tommy says, staring out the doors of the classroom and to the fucking crowd of people blocking the only entrance and exit. This is literally like, what, ten minutes after lunch ended? These bitches should be in class by now. Are they boycotting class for whatever teenage rebellion this is?

(Everything is closing in. *Everything is closing in.* Tommy can see the hand-prints on the walls by students *peeking in, eyes on all of them, watching. Watching, waiting, looking for weakness. Any of them could be spies,* his mind reminds him. *Any of them could be a villain.* Nezu and Aizawa and all the other heroes are smart, *but villains can be even better, even sneakier—like Eret.*

The *students morph into pitch black spaces that seem like void—the walls cave in, imploding, collapsing, revealing obsidian—Tommy is fifteen again, hunched over with the old L'Manburg, battered and bruised—and his hope—their hope—grows, grows, grows—*

—Eret crushes it with the push of his finger and a laugh.

Tommy blinks, and none of that has happened. He looks at his hands—of course they're shaking again—and remembers that Eret's okay now. She's better now. Learnt what they did wrong. He breathes, body subconsciously shifting closer to the windows, and makes sure Clara's in his inventory.)

At least the others seem just as surprised.

"Wh...W-What's going on?!"

"What business do you have with Class 1-A?"

"We can't get out!" Mineta raises a fist, "What'd you come here for, anyway?!"

Bakugo shoves past Uraraka, Iida, and Mineta. Though, even with Tommy near their path, Bakugo doesn't bump into him. "Scouting out the enemy, small fry," he states, eyebrows already furrowing more than usual. "We're the ones who made it out of the villains' attack. They probably want to check us out before the Sports Festival."

...That makes sense. But do they have to be so aggressive about it? Like Prime, Tommy knows they're jealous, but...

Maybe an improved future or their reputation's on the line? This is practically broadcast everywhere, if what Iida said is true. If they do well, then it's good for them; if they do bad...

Actually, wait. Are they all masochists? Do they want a position in U.A.'s top Hero Course, thinking of it as a joke or an easy class, when this class literally almost died to real, genuine villains that wanted their fucking blood?

Tommy narrows his eyes. No fucking *way* he's letting any of these shitheads stay in. He'll hold Aizawa's coffee hostage and make the man expel them if that's what it takes.

"...doing stuff like that," Bakugo's saying. The crowd outside shifts, the air changing into something more... weary. Never mind that—is he being diplomatic for once? "Out of my way, extras!"

...Prime-fucking-*damn-it*. Tommy almost—*almost*—groans into his hands at the resounding uproar that the mob makes in response. Class 1-A's reputation from the USJ is now fucking gone.

"Stop calling people extras just because you don't know them!" Iida exclaims, doing his hands thing. Tommy almost wants to laugh; like that'll stop him.

A drawling voice, one almost eerily like Aizawa's, comes in. "I came to see what the famous Class 1-A was like," they say, pushing through the crowd, "but you seem pretty arrogant." A head of purple, wild hair appears, paired with eye-bags that could rival Aizawa's. "Are all the students in the Hero Course like this?"

Tommy bristles, just as Bakugo does. (The similarities are uncanny—no, no, no, Tommy is his own person. Tommy is not him. Tommy isn't, he swears; he could've been like Bakugo once, but he isn't. He *isn't*.) The others wave their hands and heads in denial frantically.

"Seeing something like this makes me disillusioned." The newcomer ends up putting a hand under their head, briefly scratching their head. "There are quite a few people enrolled in General Studies or other courses because they didn't make it into the hero course. Did you know that?"

"The school has left those of us a chance." They lower their hand, staring at Bakugo, of which is scowling. "Depending on the results of the Sports Festival, they'll consider our transfer into the Hero Course. And it seems as if they'll also transfer people out."

Everyone in the classroom stiffens—besides Bakugo and Tommy. The latter has a contemplative look on his face, mixed with a frown that mars it.

Their amethyst eye scans the classroom. "Scouting out the enemy? I, at least, came to say that even if you're in the Hero Course, if you get too carried away, I'll sweep your feet out from under you.

"I came with a declaration of war," they end with. Tommy's face relaxes in an instant, inventory open, eye intent on them. They seem to sense the sharp, intense stare, looking right back—and their eyes widen. Surprise? Shock?

It doesn't matter. *I came with a declaration of war*, they said. Tommy is used to wars.

There's a critical error in what they've said, of which would've passed by Tommy had he not been in wars before and—and brothers with a silver-tongued terrorist. The part where they say, *they'll consider our transfer into the Hero Course*, may be true, but the sentence after might not.

Tommy wouldn't have mentioned it. After all, he's a kind, considerate guy in his opinion. This also serves as motivation for the class as well as healthy competition, and anything he will say will only make things go downhill like it always does. However—

I came with a declaration of war.

How dare they. How fucking *dare they*.

Tommy looks at him, expressionless, and keeps staring. "Where is your proof?"

They still. Everyone looks at Tommy. "What—?"

"Where's your fucking proof, that if someone in this class were to under-perform, they'd kick them out? All Aizawa's told the class is that it's a chance for people to shine, and I presume that the other teachers have told you lot that it's both that and a chance to rise the ranks. Who has said that they'll kick a member of the current Hero Course out?"

Taking a breath, Tommy glances at the class; they seem to look at him with a sort of awe. Focusing again in the tense silence, he continues, "If everyone were to do outstanding in this course, yet some of *you* perform just as well, then who would be kicked out? That's a no-gain situation for Nedzu and the entire world, you know, if they trade a student for another but both did well. It's a shit idea. If anything, it'd disrupt the current dynamics of teamwork that everyone has with the person they've partnered with in hero classes.

"No one has ever said the Hero Course has to be twenty students, either. Adjustments can be made to the classes, you know. This school is *filthy* fucking rich; of *course* they've got enough money to spare. Hell, maybe they'll make another Hero Course! They can afford it, and they've already done so with 1-B; they just might not have enough heroes that have the time or will.

"Even if a student in this course can be kicked and that rule is unsaid, have you considered the fucking USJ attack that happened not long ago?" Tommy scowls, emotions erupting higher and higher even as the others around him become uneasy. The air is straining, and he can't breathe—but Tommy is used to that. He isn't sure if this fucker is, though.

"Real, genuine villains came for their fucking blood, and the villains weren't even after them!" He says, loud and clear. "They went after these students when All Might didn't arrive! They could be dead! Can you handle that, the deaths of people you've recently known in the one place you're supposed to be safe? Would you want to trade places for that? I'm not *dissuading* you, I'm making sure your commitment is *genuine*."

"So," Tommy begins to conclude, remembering every single damning war he's been through, "is this 'declaration of war' really to everyone's benefit, or is it to cause enough disunity in this course to make it collapse? If it's the latter, then that isn't very heroic, innit? Does that make you worthy of that title, as you have proclaimed here?"

The silence is strung even higher. Mini-Aizawa actually looks stunned, before openly scowling. "And you, yourself, are my prime role-model?"

Tommy laughs. "Fuck no!" He states. "I'm probably the least heroic here! No one is a hero here—not officially, and maybe not even morally! Hell, All Might is number one, but even he could've done some moral wrongs, y'know?" Tommy sighs, relaxing his stance (and ignoring the thoughts of Phil and Techno, because he's already barely managing to not scream.) "All I'm saying is that some are worse or less-deserving than others, and I think you should look at yourself first before slandering others.

"Cause if you're just as corrupt as the villains you despise, manipulating your words to cause shit," he starts, thinking of brown hair and round glasses and a beanie and a billowing, ripped coat and *are we the villains, Tommy?* "Then what does that make you?"

He can't fight physically, the mere thought of killing now making something in his stomach curl unpleasantly, but...

You want a cold war? Tommy asks with a silent smile in the dead quiet, all sharp teeth. *I'll fucking bring it to you.*

Mini-Aizawa flinches. Oops. Did Tommy step on a nerve or go too hard?

Wait—when did Bakugo look that vulnerable and contemplative?! Tommy drops the smile and purses his lips at the sudden fluctuating temperatures, too, discreetly selecting Clara but not taking her out. And some of the students look like they're having a crisis. That... wasn't really Tommy's intention, and it'd be a lot funnier, the expressions their faces are twisting into and this silent chaos he's caused, if it wasn't so *serious*.

Opening his mouth, Mini-Aizawa manages to start saying "I—"

"HEY, HEY!" Someone shouts, effectively breaking the weary atmosphere. Tommy minutely flinches at the noise, and even more so when someone just—fucking—pops over everyone else's heads? They've got long, spiky white hair and whiter eyelashes just as long, framing their wide eyes and near-nonexistent irises. "I'm from Class 1-B next door! I heard you fought against villains, so I came to hear 'bout it! Don't get so full of yourself!"

Tommy takes a glance at Kirishima to make sure he's still there, and that he didn't just cosplay as an alter ego just for a bit.

"If you bark too much, it'll be embarrassing for you durin' the real fight!" Kirishima 2.0 shouts.

Bakugo, with one last glance at Tommy, just starts making his way through the crowd, the people parting for him. He brushes against Mini-Aizawa, who lets himself be pushed aside, still in his... crisis. Wow, Tommy must've *really* hit something.

Enraged, Kirishima 2.0 keeps screaming. "You ignorin' me, bastard?!"

"Wait a minute, Bakugo," Kirishima says, rushing to the entrance/exit, "What're you gonna do about all of this?! It's partially your fault that everyone's hating on us!"

Bakugo stops, looking back without fully turning around. "It doesn't matter," he says, but the usual aggression in his voice is a little—off.

"Huh?!"

"It doesn't matter as long as you rise to the top." With that, Bakugo leaves.

"Damn you bastard!" Kirishima 2.0 shouts.

Tommy finally closes his inventory as Kirishima clenches his fist and starts praising how manly Bakugo's reasoning is. The atmosphere finally lifts a little as it's followed by Satou and Tokoyami's agreement, along with Kaminari's protests. The rest of the class seems to focus on them for more comedic relief or something.

Izuku's still staring at Tommy, just as contemplative as Bakugo was. "Cut that shit out," Tommy hurriedly whispers when he hears him, "you're gonna word-vomit everythin' in your head. Plus, you're blinking in like... twenty-second intervals; do you know how scary that is? Your mind's coming up with like a thousand plans or something, I'm sure of it."

"Wh-What?!" Izuku exclaims, fortunately snapping out of it. His face warms into a healthy pink. "Um! I—sorry! It's—"

"Habit, I know," Tommy says. "C'mon, Big Man; go to your next class."

"You. Eye-patch." Oh shit, Mini-Aizawa hadn't left? Tommy looks up, a little flabbergasted at the determined stare he meets. "I'll make sure I'll show you that I'm not a villain. Just watch me."

Tommy watches them leave.

"...Wait," he calls out, maybe a little too late as the thought finally strikes him. "What's your—name... and pronouns..."

Man. Guess he has to wait until the event.

Shoto exhales for the nth time, watching the frost come out of his breath. He reduces the cold in his body as much as he can, watching as with every step he takes, his frost breath reduces. He can feel the heat of blood in his face lower, bit by bit.

It might not entirely fade, today—at least, until he goes back to the house and Endeavor makes it fade.

"'Cause if you're just as corrupt as the villains you despise, manipulating your words to cause shit, then what does that make you?" Tommy looked terrifyingly old as he said that, visible eye eerily blank, as if his mouth were forming the words just to get the point across. Shoto hadn't been able to control his sudden burst of emotions properly enough, if the sudden shifting but gradually colder temperatures on his left side were to mean anything.

Quickly, he reins the frost in, biting on his inner cheek hard enough to maybe make a puncture wound. He wasn't fast enough, if Tommy's frown is anything to go by.

Endeavor would beat Shoto for that.

He frowns, pausing for just a moment as he looks at his hands. Shoto forms them into a fist to stop the shaking. His nails dig into his skin; it's grounding.

"Cause if you're just as corrupt as the villains you despise, manipulating your words to cause shit, then what does that make you?"

If Endeavor is just as corrupt as the villains he despises, doing just as much collateral damage as they would if they were let free, then what does that make him?

If Endeavor is just as corrupt as the villains he despises, making Shoto "train" mercilessly every day, then what does that make him?

An English saying comes to his head: *the road to hell is paved with good intentions*. Wrongdoings or evil actions are often undertaken with good intentions.

Shoto purses his lips. Would Endeavor's "good intentions" be boosting his reputation and legacy? Then the saying doesn't apply to this, doesn't it.

So if Endeavor is now the villain and Shoto is training to be a hero...

Sighing softly, Shoto continues to walk. Maybe if he rations his lunch money well enough or he steals Endeavor's credit card again, he can afford a camera.

The next couple of weeks that pass are just pure training, almost to a workaholic level. In class, Tommy helps with weaponry and hand-to-hand, and his sector steadily improves. He hasn't consulted Aizawa yet, but from how his side doesn't ever get one member dismissed or something and Aizawa doesn't complain about them as much as Tommy thought he would, his side must be going well, too.

Bakugo's also gained a more precise control of his explosions, too. There's never a larger blast like what'd happened the first day, and the only thing close to it is smoke. Sometimes their sparring sessions go for a few minutes before Tommy overpowers him, and that's because some of Bakugo's underhanded tricks catch him off-guard. Tommy also hits Bakugo as if he were just a random opponent and not Dre—not one of his most hated enemies ever.

The Cobblers and Saplings are improving rapidly, too. Tommy is the best and biggest teacher, yeah, but he sure-as-hell is doing well for his first class.

"...I still win..." Tommy huffs, wiping sweat off his forehead. On the ground, Izuku lays, face up, practically splayed on the ground in a starfish-position. The sun beats down on them both, and the recent spar just made the heat worse. "You... you may be... improving... but I... will always be... the bigger... man."

Izuku tries to sit up, wincing at something on his upper side before flopping back down. Tommy smirks; that must be a bruise he left from a kick.

He'd taken to targeting Izuku's torso more in their no-Quirk sparring sessions during classes because all the power's currently in his legs from running, jumping, and enhancing his legs with OFA. Izuku's gotten used to agility like Tommy, yet isn't versed well with someone who's faster than him. So, because Tommy's still faster and is more rounded, and Izuku focuses more on his lower half than his upper, Tommy can still beat his ass.

Still... "Are you... like a fucking feral hero fighting-style... conglomerate mess?" Tommy questions, nudging the other with his shoe. Izuku bats the foot away halfheartedly, only mildly irritated at the added dirt in his fluffy hair. "What the fuck... was that high-kick as a... as a feint? When did you learn... to do gymnastics?" His gut still hurts from the sudden not-kick-to-back-flip-to-rushing-punch bullshit.

"Self-taught in... in my free-time," Izuku explains vaguely.

Tommy lightly kicks him again. "I call bullshit."

"You're just jealous."

"Fuck you, you stupid bitch."

"No thanks!"

Tommy chokes on his laughter, hunched over as Izuku finally decides to get up and not soak up the sun like the plant he could become. "What—what the *fuck*—did fighting make you witty?!"

"It's entirely your fault for both influencing me and for falling for that," Izuku smiles, and Prime, Tommy feels a sense of pride for this gremlin. "Another spar?"

"Fuck yeah," Tommy exclaims, a new, boyish grin on his face as he steps back. Izuku does the same, though his gentle smile looks far, far more deceiving. "Bring it on, bitch!"

Where'd you get all of this shit?! Tommy asks, a hand moving to pick up a handful of feathers.

It's lunch time, currently. Maybe half a week in training, or three-fourths. Koda's backpack had been a lot fuller than usual, today, to the point where there was a visible lump to it, and the person had just. Brought it in the lounge, took out a large bag that'd probably taken up a lot of the space and made the visible lump on his backpack, and opened it on the large table to reveal so many fucking *feathers*.

...Holy *shit*, they're so *soft*.

It's my Quirk. Koda responds, even more hesitant than usual.

Tommy unceremoniously lets the feathers fall back into the feather sack, before his hands sign wildly. ...You can make *feathers*?!

No! No, it's— There's a pause in their signing. Please don't make fun of me, but—I can control animals, in a sense. Not in a mind-control way, but I can coerce them into helping me out and stuff. I can also talk to them.

Koda probably doesn't expect Tommy to gape at him for that long. But Tommy does for at least a minute.

"Oh my Prime," Tommy reverently whispers. Gently, slowly, he sets his hands on their shoulders, weak enough that if they want to move, they can, and stares at them—not in the eye, of course, but on the nose bridge. With his long arms, he's leaving enough space to let Koda sign. "Can you. Can you talk to cows, too?" Tommy asks like a starving man desperate for food. "Is it limited to small animals?"

...I think I can? Talk to and coerce a cow, that is. Koda says after some contemplation. I—I haven't tried before since my parents have only let me have small animals like bunnies or birds, and their language must be vastly different, but... With a lot more confidence in Koda-standards, which isn't really much, he continues, if you know where any cows are, I can try!

Tommy swallows audibly, eyes welling. It's just sand, though. It is, even as he sniffles. "Koda," he chokes out as the mentioned teen visibly goes through a silent crisis of *why is he crying what did I do wrong*, "Koda, you are the best. You are the biggest man ever—man being gender neutral. Your Quirk is the greatest of all time. You are so amazingly poggers you might even rival me."

Taking a shuddering breath, Tommy lets go, but not without one last shoulder squeeze. I'm going to ask Nedzu if I can get an area for animals in U.A. for training purposes; if he says yes, if the area's made, can you—Prime, his hands are shaking—Can you please. Can you ask a cow to let me pet it? Or hug it? Whichever's fine.

Koda nods as soon as they comprehend that. Do you want me to ask any other animals? He inquires, and oh. Oh, oh, oh, Tommy will genuinely cry. Koda has to stop throwing sand in his eyes.

A—A sheep? And I— Tommy stops for a moment, hands trembling too much. Once he can breathe again, he tries again. I—I don't know, a horse? A horse. A horse, and a cat, and a dog. And a bunny. Maybe a spider?

(He just doesn't want to be alone again. Tommy's mind thankfully stops his hands from signing that, though.)

Koda looks fucking terrified, so Tommy immediately tacks on, You don't have to talk to all of them! I just—the cow and sheep are all I really need. If you can't talk to them all, that's entirely fine. I only want to pet them. That's it.

That makes way for a determined expression to come back to the other's face. No, he says. I'll talk to all of them. I'll do it.

You sure? I mean, like you said, you haven't tried talking to larger animals, so the cow and the sheep must be a lot—

I'll do it, they repeat. Don't worry. We should probably eat before the bell rings, though. And you still have to talk to the Principal.

...Alright, Tommy relents, snatching his plate of curry and sitting on a short bookshelf. He takes small bites no matter how much he wants to inhale it while, before setting the plate down on his lap, an eighth done, and scowling at his hands. They're still shaking a little more than usual.

No better time to take his communicator out.

<13:07>

<big man> Nezu

<big man> Nedzu*

<big man> Can an areanbe changed ir made si that Koda Kohi can practixe his quirk

<big man> Sorry, shaky hadns

<big man> hands*

<rat man> Do you need any help?

<big man> No

<big man> Just emotiosn and shit

<big man> Can an area be changed or made so that Koda Koji can practice his quirk

<big man> Has to do with talking to animals and shit

<big man> Theres no animals on campus

<big man> If it makes you uncomfortable then you dont have to make one

<rat man> Ah. Don't worry, I've long since come to terms about my species. Thank you for your consideration, however. :)

<rat man> This is also a perfect coincidence; recently, some of our students have been petitioning for a space for those with Quirks relying on communication with or involving nature to have their own training space on U.A.'s grounds. That space will soon be developed in some of the unused buildings near the natatorium.^[3]

<rat man> Does Koda have any animals in particular they want in the habitat?

<big man> Give me a moment

<rat man> Take all the time you need.

<big man> "Larger and more diverse animals, please. It dorsn't matter what type. I want to strengthen my quirks influence on them, as I have probably already gotten a strong grasp on smaller animals like birds or rabbits. Also some insects because I'd like to start getting over my entomophobia."

<rat man> Alright, that's doable. Does he mind if the requests of others influence the animals he may see?

<big man> They say no

<big man> Can I suggest some that I'd like to have too

<rat man> Go ahead.

<big man> A cow

<big man> And a sheep

<big man> And bunnies

<big man> And a horse

<big man> A cat and a dog

<big man> Maybe a spider

<big man> Is that too much

<rat man> Depending on the requests of the petitioners. Though, some may want the exact animals you do.

<big man> Though that's annoyingly vague for shit like this

<big man> You're very poggers

<big man> Thank you

<rat man> No problem. :)

Tommy takes a bite of his curry with a satisfied smile as Koda stims in joy.

That's how, only a few days after that, the wildlife habitats are established in U.A.

The wildlife habitats are divided into quarters, with each quarter having two respective buildings. Quarter A is for insects (A-1) and plants (A-2), filled with colorful foliage and equally brilliant bugs. Quarter B is for larger land animals (B-1), such as sheep, pigs, cows, and the like. B-2 is for birds, and is presumably decorated with lots of animal perches, from what Tommy's heard.

Quarter C is for animals that live in more intense environments. C-1 and C-2 are divided into two floors, C-3 and C-4 being the higher floors respectively. The upper floors are for more exotic land animals, and the lower are for sea-water animals. Finally, Quarter D is more for the general student body and not just those with an animal-related Quirk. D-1 is for service animals and therapy animals. D-2 has been turned into a place for potential training grounds for those who come to the wildlife habitats regularly.

"*OhmyPrime*," Tommy reverently whispers as he enters Quarter B-1, Koda right behind him. There's already some people here, communicating to the animals and such. Even though D-1 exists, Tommy's already checked that place, and there's no cows. Only relatively small and soft creatures, like bunnies. Of course, he likes the bunnies, but—

"Koda," he says, gesturing to the large animal pen and, more specifically, the cows' sector, "*Koda*, can you—"

I'll try, they say, letting Tommy take the lead as he practically runs over to the cows.

The blond stops right at the fence, peering at the cows. Cows, plural. Plural! "Hello," he says at their stares, voice lowered. "You're all so beautiful, you know that? Or handsome."

Koda appears at his side. He beckons the cows closer, one of which does. Tommy does his best to listen in, but Koda's mainly talking in low, drawn-out, and nonsensical grumbles that vary in tone, along with a few... huffs? He isn't sure if they're in aggravation, because they have different tones, too.

It should be going good, though. Maybe. The cow hasn't moved besides the flick of their tail, and they're making the same noises Koda is in response, so.

...Alright, Koda declares, moving away. The cow trots over to Tommy. I think I got their language down? It was a lot more instinctual than I thought. Anyway, I think the cow—a female, by the way—is fine with you petting her.

Tommy can't help but grin and pump his fist up in excitement. He slows his movements down immediately so as to not frighten the cow and sets a hand on her head.

She doesn't move away; in fact, she nuzzles his hand with her forehead, pushing it back a little. The blond almost laughs at the little burst of *joy* that brings. Is this what being high feels like?

Carefully and softly, Tommy pets the cow like he'd do with Henry. The cow stays still, and her tail's flicking back and forth even more.

"You are so, so poggers," Tommy states, glancing to Koda and absolutely not tearing up. "Thank you." Koda smiles shyly in response.

After a bit of just petting her in the quiet white noise, the blond quietly declares, "Your name is now He—Clementine. Yeah, Clementine. Is that alright?" His hand freezes when she—Clementine—chuffs, afterwards making a droning, low sound.

(Because the only other name Tommy can think of is Henry, and he knows what happens to cows named Henry. They always die.)

Koda waves his hands a little to get Tommy's attention. That chuff means she likes the name, he says. She—she also claims you as hers now? I don't know what that's about, but... yeah.

"I'll assume that that's good, then," Tommy decides, startling when another cow's head bumps into his hand. Immediately, he uses his other hand to pet that cow.

Apparently that starts a domino effect, because soon, Tommy has an entire mob of cows butting over each other to get his attention. He accepts it with ease, laughing every time one manages to lean out and rub their head against his chest. But, Clementine always manages to stay in the center.

"Think she's the leader?"

Probably. Koda seems to glance behind them, before signing, I think lunch is going to end soon, though, because most of the students here are leaving. We should probably start heading back, too.

Tommy sighs. He takes another glance at the cows before reluctantly pulling away, grimacing when they start mooing—are they disappointed? "Don't worry, I'll be here after school," he reassures, backing away slowly. "I'll be back! I swear!"

The cows back down a little, some already dispersing into another place in their pen. It's only Clementine's final word—a loud moo and the turn of her head—that makes the others completely separate.

"...Let's go," Tommy says, finally managing to tear himself away and out the building. Koda nods, moving to his side with a smile on his face.

Tommy gives Koda stacks of dull-pointed arrows the day after, along with a leather quiver. It's the blond's first time making one, so it's a little shabby, but it works for these arrows. You still have the crossbow, yeah? He asks after giving him the quiver. Once I teach you how it works, go fucking ham whenever you want.

They beam.

The days pass. Class 1-A improves by leaps and bounds, maybe having the upper hand on others by being able to spar with each other during Hero Lessons. The visits to the wildlife habitats become a regular thing. Whenever he has time, Tommy goes to visit Tari's and just relax. (Tommy doesn't think his life has ever felt this—*full*, not since before the SMP.)

And then, it's the day of the Sports Festival.

Chapter End Notes

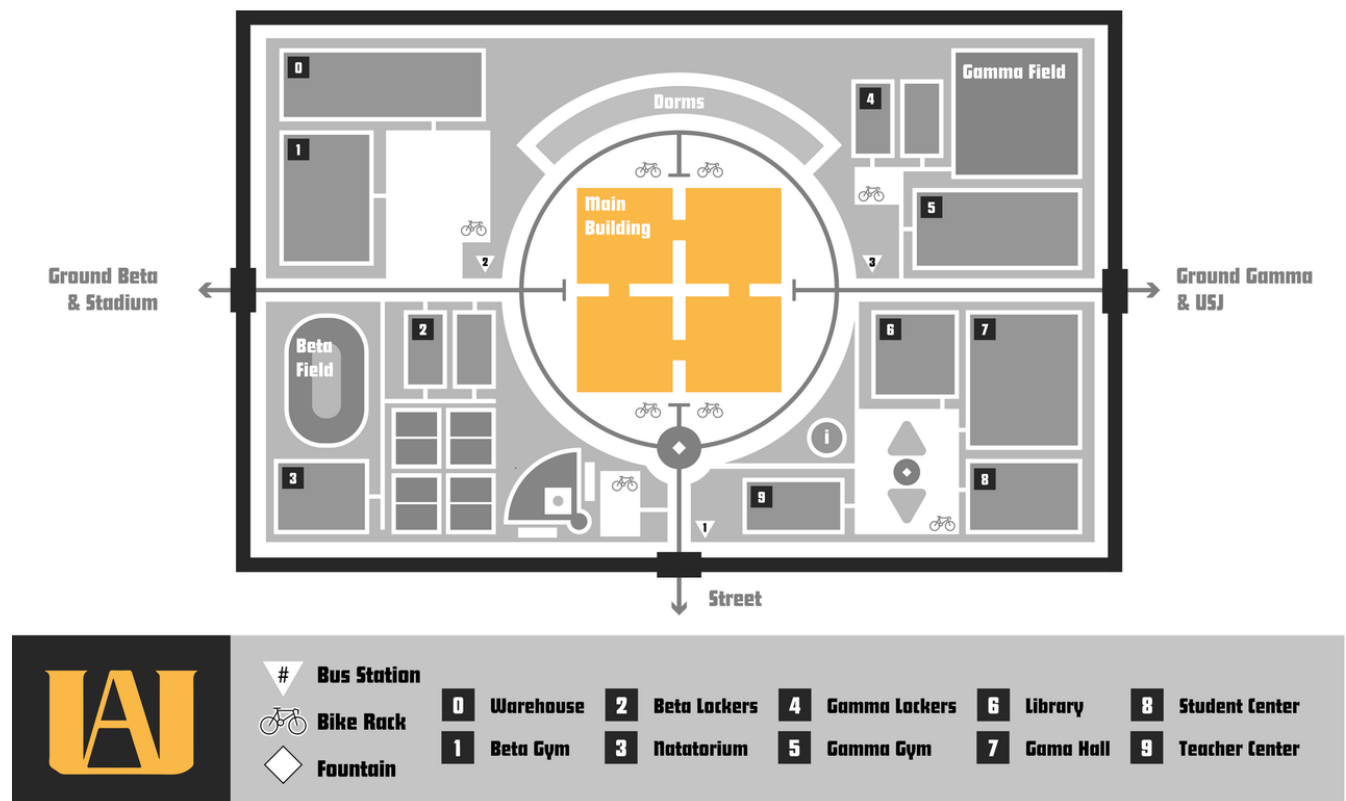
1. in one of wilbur's vids there's a thing where tommy says his favorite food is curry via lots of misinterpreted hand motions—'m not sure what the actual video/vod(?) is *called*, but there's a clip if you search it up, so!! [\[return to text\]](#)

2.,,, imagine accidentally fucking up a bnha scene just because of something entirely in character that tommy would do

,,,,,, couldn't be me, no way. not me and the whole talk izu and toshinori have, noooo way

um. n e way they'd prolly go to an empty staff meeting room or smth—the other teachers there know abt ofa so they're safe. all might would prolly lie an' say that he needed some assistance in some task n whatever if a student saw, so [\[return to text\]](#)

3. the map i'm considering is this:



nedzu's talkin abt those kinda 4x4 separated places near 3, or the bottom left

's by [*bnha-admin on DevianArt*](#)

[\[return to text\]](#)

tommy knows the names of everyone due to discussions w/ koda during the lunch period. he still doesn't have a roster atm, so koda just spelt all the names out in kanji for him

grand debut.

Chapter Summary

sports festival! sports festival!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Immediately, Tommy wakes up in his room feeling that the Festival won't be right. He (ignores the fear that cuts into him like a sword and) groans, almost rolling off his bed.

...It's not as intense as the day of the USJ attack, maybe. Tommy gets up anyway, flicking his wrist and checking his inventory.

Ehh... He still has a lot of his shit he had from the first day. Blocks, weapons, medical shit... he doesn't really need to refill that much. U.A. had provided a lot for the class, anyway.

Wouldn't hurt to refill, either. And he could fill more room in his chests with materials to craft with.

Tommy checks his communicator; he has time. It's only five in the morning, after all. Three hours to go before he has to go to U.A.

Ah, shit—he hasn't made a mineshaft here yet, hasn't he? Maybe he could make one in the basement and somehow connect it to the one in the forest.

Tommy equips a pickaxe from his inventory with ease, already heading down to the basement. It'd serve as a good stretch before whatever the Sports Festival will cause, and a way to get his mind off of it.

Mining a few blocks of diamond ore and deep into his new mineshaft, Tommy comes to a sudden realization: he hasn't made a Nether portal yet.

He almost smacks himself in how fucking dumb he is; why hadn't he made one? That was like... one of the first fucking things he should've done when he made the mineshaft in the forest, Prime-damn-it. He could've made so many golden apples now with the gold he could find, since this server's Overworld gold is weird.^[1]

...Then again, he had just been... dropped in this server, and everything was just so—different. Then Izuku and Toshinori came, and with that followed U.A...

Focus, Tommy.

The gold in this server didn't work here to make golden apples like most servers, but maybe the Nether here was the same as the SMP's?

With new fervor, Tommy rushes to find lava—not before crafting buckets with a nearby crafting table he'd placed, of course. Five's enough for this.

"Swear some of this shit was around," he mumbles, dashing through the long tunnels he's dug in. His eye scans each hole in the tunnels. "C'mon, c'mon..."

There!

Tommy skids to a halt, balancing himself by placing his hands on the walls. He turns towards the relatively-large lava pool—wait, he needs water.

...Water bottles could do, right?

So, Tommy mentally marks the place in a map in his head, before darting back to the entrance of this new mineshaft with long strides. He climbs up the stairs to the basement, digs through his plethora of chests, and finally finds the one with the stacks of water bottles in it. (Listen, he just likes to store shit in case of emergency, alright?)

Uncapping and pouring two at a time into two of the buckets he'd crafted, Tommy fills them to the brink, shoves the plastic in his inventory along with the buckets of water, and heads back down to the pool of lava. There, he makes a room in one of the walls, setting up a two-by-two, one block deep hole with space to walk around it. He pours the two buckets in two of the corners, prays to fucking Prime this works, and attempts to fill up three buckets.

The pool refills itself.

"Alright!" He cheers, giddily taking the three buckets back to the lava pool. He builds a platform in the middle—three-by-six, just enough to have a block of cobble surround where the portal would stand—as well as a path equally wide from the platform to the entrance of the room. The sudden temperature change by being near the lava is intense, but Tommy's long been immune to this heat, so it doesn't deter him. Instead, it only pushes him to move faster, his mind supplying him with the quickest way to build a Nether portal with ease.

Lava, water. Lava, water. Three blocks up, two across; corners aren't necessary.

Within moments, Tommy stands before an unlit Nether portal with cobblestone corners. He just stands before it for a moment, because Prime... he hasn't done this in months, hasn't he? Hasn't done this in a year. Hasn't done what others would consider a basic standard for anyone in a *year*.

(...It reminds him of how out-of-place he is. How out-of-place he's *become*, to both this server and the ones he knows.)

Tommy huffs, moving on from his mistake. After all, he needs a flint 'n' steel to light this bitch up, and he'd found gravel while digging around some coal.

Quickly, the blond makes the tool. It pops in his hands once he sets it in his hotbar and selects it, the cool metal so familiar against his calloused hands Tommy's surprised at the nostalgia it inflicts. Yet without pause, he moves to the Nether portal and strikes the flint over the obsidian

once,

twice,

thrice.

And to Tommy's utter *delight*, the portal's center ignites in purple swirls and sparks.

Tommy forces himself to stop staring after the fifth minute. But—Prime, he can't help it! *Finally*, something familiar about this server! Something that doesn't leave him confused and curious, something that doesn't make him completely out of his depth! Something that he knows can help him!

Before the flint 'n' steel can slip out of his hands from pure shock and excitement, Tommy stashes it away for later. Unceremoniously, he steps forward and immerses himself into the portal, waiting for the familiar nausea, the feeling of being transported through realms, the burst of heat from the new yet familiar surrounding environment—

—it doesn't come.

Tommy waits one minute; two. Three.

...Four.

"What the *fuck*," he whispers, a feeling of despair washing over him. Except—no, that can't be it, because it's something deeper than despair, something *worse*. It threatens to take over his mind, this mix of terror and hopelessness and rage the longer the portal remains unresponsive. With panic, Tommy steps out, then steps back in, but—fuck, there's still nothing, why is there still *nothing*?!

He backs off, staring at the purple swirls in—in—Prime, he doesn't know, he doesn't know. Why is the portal not working? He's done everything right. Three blocks high, two blocks across, make with obsidian. He's done everything right.

He's done everything right, he *has* to have done everything right; otherwise, there wouldn't be anything in the fucking *portal*. So why isn't he—

No. No—no, no, no. It—it can't be *that*, can it?

Has—has this server blocked off the connection to the fucking *Nether*? The *one* place Tommy could maybe get gold to make golden apples that fucking *works*, and it's fucking *BLOCKED*?! The *End* he can understand because there's a fucking dragon there, but—*but*—the *NETHER*?!

Tommy's staggered away from the platform, down the path, and dug his pickaxe into the stone entrance before he can even process he's done it, ripping chunks of cobblestone out with ferocity. The blocks clatter on the ground, tumbling into the lava pool behind him. He doesn't feel an inch of regret staring at the gouge that mars the stone, however, because *fuck*, his anger is absolutely justified! He's running out of golden apple slices, too—there's only what, ninety left? Eighty? Compared to the *hundreds* he'd had before, that's a steep decline. He'll run out if something like the USJ keeps happening.

Fuck. *Fuck*.

Something like hysteria claws in his throat, and he lets it rip him apart, collapsing on the ground with his knees scraping on rough, heated stone.

Because the shortage of golden apples just add to another, more distressing problem, one that he might not be able to handle both physically *and* mentally: if this server has blocked off the Nether, then that means that there's a fucking *Admin*, isn't there?

As much as he wants to scream and break shit, Tommy has to leave the mineshaft since he'd been down there for two and a half hours and he has to go to U.A. But, the questions that fill his head certainly don't.

Why block off the Nether? Why hasn't this Admin communicated to Tommy at all? Why has this Admin decided to give everyone Quirks instead of the standard inventory and all of the Players usual abilities, like crafting with a holographic grid? Is there more than one Admin here? How powerful are they, to hide their name on Tommy's communicator, one that *Sam* had made himself? Sam had been friends with Dream before it all went to shit, and the latter's an Admin; the engineer certainly knows how to make his communicators detect *anyone* at this point.

(If the Nether's blocked off, could they have a hoard of gold that can make golden apples? Do they hold a monopoly over *golden apples*, now?)

...Shit. Shit, shit, *shit*.)

Why make *this* server so radically different? There's no mobs, which could make it a server on Peaceful mode, but—but then, there'd be animals spawning on the streets, no? And this server's fucking limited in the amount of space its inhabitants can reside on; almost *no* server is like that. Servers can span forever, yet why make this one so overcrowded? So—*limited*?

It doesn't make sense. *None of this makes sense*.

He can't think about it any longer—doesn't *want* to, really—when he hears the sounds of multiple voices up on the hill near U.A.'s gates.

Immediately, the shouting voices of a mob grate on his ears. Tommy scowls, feeling it dampen his already-shitty mood. Peeking over the rest of the path, he can see extended microphones and flashing or recording cameras, and that sets him off even more. Does he *have* to go through this shit?

...Tommy switches his communicator from the player list to his contacts.

7:34

<big man> Hey how do I get aorund the press?

<coffeeismyblood> Were you not given a spare key to the door at the back?

Tommy moves aside as more people who don't have journalist or news-reporter equipment—tourists, maybe? Or for the Re—... *Sports* Festival—trek up the mountain and towards U.A. He checks his multiple pockets once he's off the main path.

<big man> No

<big man> Forgor the keypad code too

<coffeeismyblood> Ah.

<coffeeismyblood> Sorry. I'll get a spare for you and tell you the code again later.

<coffeeismyblood> Regardless, I'll open the door for you. Avoid the press and do *not* let them see you; you haven't been openly revealed to the world for a reason.

<big man> Wait, why havent I been revealed yet?

There's a pause—a really, really long one. The man must be banging his head on the table or something.

<coffeeismyblood> Because you're a "secret teacher," of sorts. Everyone already knows about the pro-heroes that teach here, but they don't know that you're an assisting countermeasure against future villain attacks, both as a teacher assistant and a skilled, unknown Quirkless fighter yourself. If news were to show that someone like you is here helping the classes out, especially Class 1-A, there's almost no doubt that any villains listening in will notice and therefore try to check out who you are. What Nedzu's done for you may not be enough, by then.

...Oh.

<coffeeismyblood> The only reason I'm telling you this here and not in-person is that Nedzu's programmed the custom messaging app I'm using to automatically erase all messages if it were to be hacked. I assume that your device does the same?

<big man> Prolly. Sam put a lot of

Tommy stops that text as he types it. He erases it entirely, holding backspace for a little longer than necessary, and replaces it with:

<big man> Only I can see the screen so yeah^[2]

<coffeeismyblood> Good. Head over to the back entrance now.

<big man> Yeah yeah

Tommy sets his communicator in his inventory, glancing at the still-steady stream of people that flow into U.A., some crowding around the mob of reporters as others get to slip in. He waits for a perfect time, before darting into the forest behind him, only a flash of gold in the eyes of others.

Tommy tears a piece off the takoyaki on a stick Aizawa brought him, holding another stick with dango on it. He chews on it for a bit before swallowing, eye scanning the walls of the seemingly never-ending hall. Well, really, they're almost at the end, but Tommy's a busy man, alright?

"We there yet?"

"No," Aizawa grunts, a lot more annoyance than the first few times. Maybe it's because Tommy's been asking that every since they've started going through the fucking maze of paths that is this stadium. "Once we're out of this hall, I have to go up to the announcer's booth. You have to go where the other teachers are; if you act like everything's normal when you get there, then people will believe that you're a part of the staff. You have your things, right?"

Tommy groans, slumping and temporarily slowing his pace. "I do, I do. But why do I gotta be out here? Can't I just—watch with the class or something?"

"No. Once again, as the 'secret weapon' of U.A., you're a part of the upgraded security protocol Nedzu's maintaining."

Tommy huffs, taking a step into the stadium. Right, right, stupid villain bullshi—

Oh.

"Holy shit..." Tommy trails off, gaping at the sheer *size* of the open-roofed stadium set up for the Sports Festival. The sweltering air and bright sunlight does nothing to deter him from looking around. He'd seen it from the outside and it'd already looked gargantuan and menacing like that, sure, but *this*...

"You get used to it," Aizawa says, as if he hasn't been here for who *knows* how long, the old man. Tommy would say it to his face, but the sheer size of the stadium still just—baffles him.

Tommy glances at the red square in the middle that looks so fucking minuscule compared to everything. "And the students are fighting on *that*?"

"Not really. That's where the students gather."

"Then where are they—"

"Cementoss will make a platform when the time comes, but it'll be about that size regardless."

"...Okay, but still, a platform that size barely—"

"This is for show, Tommy."

...Right. For show. This is for show. No one will get grievously injured, and even if they do, Recovery Girl's here, and Tommy's brought golden apple slices.

This is not the Red Festival. This is no violent massacre.

Tommy takes a breath, his hand briefly carding through his hair. "...I know." A thought briefly pops into his mind. "How much time 'til this shitshow begins?"

Aizawa huffs when Tommy calls the event a "shitshow," but still replies with, "About ten minutes or so."

Right. Tommy's memorized the layout of what Aizawa's shown him, and the underground hero had pointed out where Class 1-A was. "Gonna go visit the class, then," he says. "Give 'em a little support, eh? 'S also fucking burning out here."

"You do that. Just hurry up, and make sure to get into a spot on time."

Tommy grins boyishly at the man that definitely says "no promises," before going on his way.

"Tommy!" Ashido exclaims, having spotted him the moment he'd entered Class 1-A's waiting room. Everyone else is here besides Iida, quiet, nervous chatter filling the room. Though, seeing as how none of them seem to be worried about Iida, he relaxes. "You're not with our Teacher or the other heroes?"

"Nah, not yet," he replies, stealing an empty chair and kicking back on it. Tommy sighs, already feeling the air-conditioning in the air and how it cools his skin. "Five minutes or so 'til I gotta go back. Just wanted to chill, y'know? Plus, it's so fucking hot outside."

Ashido makes a drawn-out "oh" sound. "Makes sense."

"You're a part of the security, kero?" Tsuyu asks not unkindly, more curiously. She's so calm still compared to most of the others; Tommy respects that.

"Mhm. Course I am. You've seen me fight."

The frog girl only hums before going back into her own thoughts, maybe making plans or figuring out how to utilize her Quirk as efficiently as possible.

Tommy feels the urge to glance to his left. He does, only to see Izuku trembling like a newborn. Quietly, he stands up, alerting Izuku of his presence by getting in front of him. "Hey, bitch," Tommy whispers. Izuku looks up, but he doesn't verbally respond, still shaking.

"You're gonna do fine." The blond says. "Listen to me. You're gonna do *fine*. Just focus on the ene—I mean, opponent, alright? Ignore the people, ignore the crowd. Hyper-focus on the fight, on how to win, or how to lose in the best way possible that it gets the heroes' attention. Think of it like a spar with me, okay? They may not use batons or underhanded tricks or whatever, but imagine it as me trying a new fighting style. And remember what you've learnt from the hero videos, this school, All Might, and me—Big Man Tommy Innit. You hear me?"

Izuku's trembling has lessened, and there's a tiny smile that appears at the pompous self-proclaimed title Tommy's given himself. "...O-Okay," he mumbles, barely audible even in the room only filled with quiet conversation. "Yeah. I—I hear you."

Tommy smiles softly, before it goes back to his mischievous grin and he pulls back. "Even if you don't get first, at least you're here. So, make sure you kick some ass for me!"

Izuku's smile grows. "R-Right!"

Feeling like a job accomplished, Tommy moves back to the seat he'd occupied, about to lean back, when—

"Everyone, are you ready?" Iida shouts, bursting the door to the room open. "We will be entering soon!"

Tommy startles, almost falling on his way over to the chair. He almost slams his hand on the table to keep himself from falling, but manages to make the impact of his hand a lot lighter to where it sounds more like a clap instead. He takes a breath, slowly raising his palm before continuing to the doorway.

"Ah—sorry, Tommy!" The ever-studious student says, bowing at a ninety-degree angle at him. The blond waves it off as he approaches, letting the other go inside first.

Once Iida's in the room, Tommy looks back and grins. "You'll all fuckin' rock this shit!" He exclaims. "Remember your own training, as well as what you've done in class! Even if you don't do well, be glad you've made it here, eh? And if you know you aren't gonna do well, lose in the best possible way that shines a light of potential on you, alright?"

"Right!" Most of the class proclaims back. Tommy's grin turns into a smile, and he waves at them before closing the door and moving to the stadium.

...He sighs, preparing for the practical heatwave that is this day, as well as the roaring crowds and everything else he has to watch out for. His gut's still saying shit's a bit off, but... hopefully it's less dangerous than usual.

As Kayama announces the first game, Tommy ruminates on what he's learnt about the other classes.

1-B. That's the next one he's gonna help teach when he eventually has to switch classes. Some of their Quirks he can maybe guess, like the girl with vines for hair or the familiar Kirishima doppelganger from before, but others, like the blond guy with the arrogant smirk and blue eyes, he can barely tell.

And Class 1-C—Tommy glances at where they've sort of packed themselves together—is where Mini-Aizawa is. The Support Course seems to have gadgets, probably made by themselves. Don't they generally have an advantage if they've made gadgets that can suit their Quirks? Unless they're only allowed to fight with said gadgets and their physical prowess, that's pretty stupid.

Tommy mentally shakes his head, focusing on the holographic picker bar. It rapidly moves through options, blurring until it suddenly stops on one: Obstacle Race.

Izuku would be good at this, wouldn't he? With how he's managed to concentrate OFA to where he can give himself a speed boost as he moves without harming himself, and he's used to bouncing off of shit. Tsuyu, Ojio, Hagakure, and Sero might be as well. All of that would be assuming U.A.'s using a normal obstacle course, though, so he's probably wrong.

"...long as you stay on the course, it doesn't matter what you do!" Oh, he's definitely wrong. Bakugo's made a huge fucking target on the Hero Course with his hilarious, arrogant "speech," so not everyone's gonna be on their asses. Maybe even 1-B's.

Tommy sits, foot bouncing, and watches.

To say Tooru's nervous would be a slight understatement. Or a major one.

Because, well—from the brief, vague map of the heavily-simplified course, the way they're gonna even start would be through a tunnel. Tooru would be fine with it, had the map grossly overestimated the width of the tunnel; just by looking at the width of the gate, she can already tell that people will hold themselves back trying to shove in front of each other.

With how her Quirk is, everyone might just see her as air and not bother at least trying to avoid her. They'd push her around because they can't see her. Adding the already-heavy amounts of shoving, and it's not a good image for any of them. Thus, weaving through people with water boxing won't work

unless she's *way* ahead, and though it might help on some parts of the obstacle course, she might have too much of a belated start to even use that.

Speaking of the obstacles themselves, no one has any idea what they'll be, nor what order. Some obstacles might be repeated, but the sequence is never the same. Water boxing would be rendered useless besides for its fluid, swift movements, and even that could lose worth in this.

She doesn't have time to think about it. The lights on the gate overhead dim—three, two, *one*—!

Tooru can barely blink before everyone's almost left her behind. She catches up easily, of course, but only near the end of the mob of students. There's no chance she's getting through that mass of people.

As she tries her best to not be swept into the middle, her mind analyzes everything around her desperately. The walls are smooth, no climbing on those—agh, she's so jealous of Tsuyu, look at her up above—no, not the time! The floor's flat, too, so that doesn't help. The mob is dense, people practically climbing over each other, scrambling to—

Wait. Climbing over?

Tooru eyes the walls. The people, their heights. She's strong enough, isn't she? Water boxing's probably given her enough body strength to lift herself up on others' shoulders, and it also gives her a sense of environmental awareness and coordination. If she can get on someone's shoulders near a wall, then...

(A memory flits in her head. Of watching one of the many dark, low-quality videos on the internet about a new vigilante—Dusk, their name was—and admiring the graceful but feral way they'd duped the villains they were fighting, leading them into each other by jumping on them and using their bodies as boards to leap off of.

It had ended with the villains knocking into each other and essentially making themselves unconscious due to Dusk's feet shoving them around. They hadn't even needed to use their signature staff.)

Yes. Yes, that could work! She's invisible, too, so people won't notice!

Tooru starts sliding her way over to the sides of the seemingly never-ending tunnel. She looks at the people there—oh, that person has the broadest shoulders, she can stand on them. She's a little shorter, only noticeable when she makes her way to them, but that's fine.

Setting her hands on their shoulders and hefting herself up, Tooru ignores their violent startle, managing her sense of balance. It's easy now, what with how she used to practice balancing on random things when water boxing had made her realize that her balance absolutely sucked. Hanging near the side of the tunnel is only a precautionary measure, a backup if she almost falls.

"What're you—" Her victim shouts, barely heard over the shuffle of feet, clothes, and people, but Tooru's already located another target.

"Sorry!" She shouts back, ever-so grateful and disappointed they can't see her impish smile as she moves forward onto another person's shoulders, and then another's, and another's. Every single jump causes the person to fall to the ground.

Her mind maps out the next steps like she's practicing her art, making edits on the go, looking at new opportunities and changes of movement. Sometimes a hand almost latches onto her calf or ankle,

fingers just barely grazing her skin, but she moves before it can actually grab her. And the entire time, her hand is never far off from the wall to correct her stability if needed.

She mischievously grins as she hops off another person, ignoring her past victims' startled shouts. That turns into something a lot more diabolical when Todoroki freezes a lot of people in place by covering the ground with ice.

Casually, Tooru hops off the ground and uses the wall of the tunnel as a clutch as she forces herself forward with careful steps. Though it's cold, she doesn't care, because the ice gives her ridges to dig her fingers in and pull with.

Near the exit, she turns around, seeing Bakugo, Kirishima, Momo, and Aoyama blast ahead. Tooru gives a silent wave as well as a peace sign to the mob and moves ahead with a small, tiny pep in her step, so as to not slip.

Though she knows they can't see her, she still bathes in their frustrated screams. Tommy would delight in this chaos.

Kyoka huffs, seeing her breath fog the air in front of her temporarily. She shoves one of her jacks into the tunnel's floor, pushing the right frequency through it to only shatter the layer of ice around and on her. Kicking her leg up and crashing her heel down to the ground, she watches the glimmering ice shard remains clink off her pant leg, and quickly does the same to her other leg.

She looks ahead. Todoroki's made the entire front path into ice, huh? He's probably gonna do that for the rest of the course. Kyoka's going to have to pulse a lot of sound through the ground.

Though... if she keeps cracking the ice like this, it'll give everyone else a free path. She can't afford to do that.

...Then what else?

Picking up one of the longer shards, she examines it despite the burning cold. The shard—well, it's far too big to be just a shard—the piece of ice is about the length of her leg. It seems pretty thick and durable, too, though it does become sharp near the bottom half. There's another like this one nearby, she knows there is.

What can she use these for? How can she move on ice? Ice skating? No, no, that's far too dangerous because ice can't be that tough... Skiing? No, the ground's flat...

Wait, what about climbing? Like using a pickaxe or something to dig into the mountain to pull someone up?

Kyoka stares at the long pieces of ice. She's never climbed a mountain before.

Quickly, she lays the long pieces of ice on the ground and grabs a shorter, sharper piece. She takes her jacket off, shivering at the cold air that nips her skin but still cutting the ends of her sleeves off. She eyes it—should be enough to cover most of her palm—and stabs five holes through the pieces of fabric where her fingers should go. Kyoka shimmies her hand through the makeshift gloves and puts her jacket back on over her tank-top, before grabbing the significantly-less-cold ice pieces from their blunt halves and giving herself an impromptu lesson on how to ascent with makeshift ice axes.

It's almost like pulling herself up and forward with staffs—and she hasn't been taught how to use one for no reason.

Koji stumbles out the tunnel, breathing harshly and watching more people pass by ahead of him. They feel their skin crawl at the phantom bodies that press against their skin and the loud, ringing clamor of the tunnel, but forcefully push that aside—the race is still going, after all.

...The race is still going, and he's back here. They're not gonna make it out of this round, aren't they?

No, no—he can't think like that! Subconsciously, their hands gently slap their cheeks, staying there; a grounding touch. Tommy would call him an idiot for thinking like that, for not believing he could just because of one thing.

They can do this! They can.

Carefully, Koji turns and takes cautious steps towards the border of the race, taking care to not slip. Once he gets there, he sets a hand on the wall, feeling his fingers grip the slight indented blue strip that appears every so often as the wall continues.

...That blue strip might appear just often enough for Koji to pull himself forward from the previous one and use their slight momentum grab the next. Maybe.

It's fine even if the distance is too much for the speed. He can do this.

Oh—before that, though...

They take a breath before whistling a short tune sharply. A few birds come to his aid; they're small, flitting—perfect for getting an advantage.

Koji whistles again, varying his pitches and volume to something that translates to: Can you scope out the rest of this course for me and report back, as well as tell me the best path?

The birds chirp in affirmation, some immediately swooping ahead. The remainder press the sides of their beak to Koji's cheek or the junctions of their neck and shoulder in a quick "good luck," before following their friends.

Koji smiles, whistling out a thank you before quickly focusing back on the race.

("You'll all fuckin' rock this shit! ...Even if you don't do well, be glad you've made it here, eh? And if you know you aren't gonna do well, lose in the best possible way that shines a light of potential on you, alright?")

He can do this—if not for himself, then at least for Tommy. After all, he didn't mock them for having a "weak Quirk," or for being too timid to be a hero, or being weird for not being normal, or anything of the sort; all he's done is help and believe in them, and that's more than anyone outside their family has done.

Koji will be damned if he lets that belief go to waste.

Eijirou breaks free from the robot's interior with a triumphant roar, feeling falling metal bits and pieces scrape him but do nothing. He gives himself a moment to breathe, finally feeling air in his lungs instead of metal and oil and cold *heat*.

Todoroki's a bastard for timing the positions of the robots like that! People could've *died*! That's not how being a hero works, and this Sports Festival's mainly for *standing out*, too, not *killing people*!

He quickly shakes it off with a sigh, already clambering out of the machine. The ice makes his shoes shift constantly, and it's a hassle to not slip.

Wait—these are metal. If he can use his Quirk to straighten the outside shield of the robots, then...

Eijirou rips a panel out of the robot just as he's about to jump back to the ground—and then another, just as a backup. He only molds the first panel into a crude staff, tucking both under his arm before hopping off the broken robot. Might be useful later.

The broader metal plate he uses as a shield, even though his Quirk makes it almost useless. Almost, because the metal at least blocks dust and small debris from getting into his eyes as others make the rest of the robots fall. It makes rushing ahead way more easier, as well as using the makeshift staff to dig into the notches and gaps of the larger broken machines and leap over them for a quick time-save.

But the true use of the staff, he finds, comes when he gets to the Fall.

At first, Eijirou just stands there, looking at the standing pillars and the thin ropes that connect them. How's he gonna get across *this* with the shield and staff? There's no way he's gonna be able to balance it all. And his Quirk won't help at all—it's difficult to balance while managing his Quirk to make sure it doesn't help him fall...

But that doesn't mean he can just... go on the ropes and wing it! The fall below looks endless! And the rope looks so thin! Sure, it'd be manly, but it's not worth it!

Eijirou glances at the other participants. Some are on top of the rope, dubiously making it across little by little. Others have gone below, moving across with all four limbs in action. There's also people who've only grabbed onto the rope with their hands, swinging under. For all of them, the rope bends with their weight.

...Wait.

Eijirou looks at the crude metal staff he has in his hands and grins.

Though it's not the manliest thing, at least it'll get him across the fastest.

Tommy stifles his laughter as he watches Kirishima just—fucking—hang on the rope with the staff holding him, like he's fucking *zip gliding*. The guy has his impromptu shield in his mouth, too.

He just—his legs are flailing so wildly, and he looks like he's panicking so badly every time he's even shifting the slightest! It looks ridiculous!

However, the way he's getting across isn't, regardless of how he looks as he's doing so.

The redhead's activated his Quirk on the lower half of his body, specifically his legs, dragging the rope down and giving him momentum. Then, at the end of the rope, he swings his lower half up, uses his Quirk to dig his feet into the top or side of the rocky pillar, and climbs up from there. Finally, once he's up on the top, Kirishima goes to the next rope, hangs on it again, and repeats. And because he's specifically using something from U.A.'s metal robots, the staff doesn't break because it's built to be fucking durable.

It's so... ingenious? Lucky? Absurd?

It's fucking *amazing*.

(...*Though*, it's not as amazing as when Tommy sees Koda fucking carrying themselves across the damn obstacle with a flock of birds.)

Throughout the two-week training or prep session for the U.A. Sports Festival and then a lot before that, Izuku had focused on using as little of OFA as he could while also being able to propel himself forward. He'd practiced not only during the close-combat and weaponry training, but outside of school at Takoda, too. It was because speed is vital since he doesn't have brawn, so he might as well capitalize on it like Tommy does.

Now, it's paid off at least a little; he's able to use five percent in short bursts without injuring himself too badly. Maximum amount of bursts before he'd be in danger would be about thirty, or even forty if he times them right, and for this obstacle race, it's all about timing with that.

Izuku uses another quick burst of OFA to leap across the last platform and on the elevated land of the path to the last obstacle, stumbling a little when his feet hit the ground. The impact makes him lightheaded, but he only stops for a moment to calculate how many bursts he has left (he's used nine so far, including this one,) process how he's landed (crouched, knees on the ground,) as well as his sense of direction (mostly forward, about twenty or so degrees left) before continuing to move.

Tucked under his arm is a shield, like how Kirishima had taken the metal panel out of the robot. Izuku had seen that, looked around for a brief moment, and had found a piece himself from the remains of Todoroki's attack. Could be useful for later on.

And it is.

The minefield, when he gets to it, is absolutely terrifying. Every single shock that ripples throughout the air makes his body tremble even more, the people screaming at each explosion is no help, and each fume of pink smoke that blasts from the mines and into the air makes him freeze and smell blood. Izuku can't stop trembling no matter how much he thinks that this is an event and Bakugo cannot hurt him here and Recovery Girl is here and Tommy would destroy everyone before someone could even touch him to hurt.

But it's okay, it's fine, he can handle it. He can handle this. Izuku just has to focus on digging the mines out with his metal plate, stacking them on each other, following the barest hints of a plan that he'd just thought of.

Once he does, Izuku braces himself, flopping on to the stack of mines shield-first—

—and the resounding **BOOM** is ground-breaking.

It rings in his ears. His hands, already trembling, threaten to loosen their grip on his shield. Izuku is forced through a cloud of pink smoke that clogs his breath and blocks his sight, but hangs on anyway, because this is his only chance. He feels himself rising higher, higher, higher—!

Bursting from the cloud, Izuku coughs, immediately regretting it when the high-speed winds around him make him sputter more. Yet he forces an eye open, watching, waiting.

He soars over Todoroki and Bakugo.

Oh, he's falling now, he's going to go down, down, down. (He's falling, oh *God* he's falling, he's falling like he thought he would up on that building a year ago, except this time, he wants to live, has *things to live for*, please, *please*—)

(A few times during the two weeks of Sports Festival training and after Tommy usually just sent him off to do his own training, Izuku had watched some of Tommy's vigilante videos. He'd observed as much as he could, jotting down more notes in the second version of his Dusk/Tommy fighting-analysis book to use later on.

One of those would be how Tommy uses his own opponents' weapons or the surrounding environment to boost himself in any way possible like hopping off them for a speed or jump boost or bringing the effects of their Quirks back on them. Generally, the blond looked at all the factors he could and thought of how it'd benefit him.

It was something Izuku admired about Tommy, to be able to know how to give himself an advantage in an instant. He'd also wondered how the blond had gotten to that point exactly, but brushed it off [for now] in favor of focusing on the Sports Festival.)

Before panic can fully consume his senses and thoughts, Izuku maneuvers his body mid-air, almost flipping himself over. It takes more effort than usual but still isn't too much of a problem; he's far too used to doing things like this when training.

Feet planting on the metal plate, Izuku grunts, body hunched over itself awkwardly to keep his hands latched onto the board. He charges five percent of OFA through his legs, bends his knees, tilts the plate up a little, tries to make the board as straight as he can, but no no no no *no* he's so close to the ground—!

Izuku jumps, shooting off the metal plate like a bullet. It clatters somewhere behind him—did it hit someone in the face? Did it hit *Bakugo* in the face? That has to be one of the reasons why he can hear a loud curse—but Izuku can't see where it lands completely.

After all, he has to focus on getting through the vertigo that rings in his head as his body twirls and *keeps* twirling. The only thing that's probably going to slow him down is the fact that he has to close his eyes to reduce it.

There's also how he has no idea how to control himself at the force of an explosion plus five percent of OFA and keep himself moving straight ahead,

Izuku can feel his arm graze the roof of something for just a moment, and that's just enough for his body to lose speed and start heading down.

Oh—

He has to—oh God, where is he—has to land *somewhere*—

With an ungraceful roll, Izuku tumbles, feeling whatever ground he's on scrape his skin. He cries out, and the sound echoes, and—what—where *is* he—

Izuku staggers to his feet, clutching his head as his vision swims. There's the sound of pounding feet coming closer behind him, though faint.

Right—Izuku has to move forward. There's—is that light? Grass? He can just—crawl to that. It's not far.

So, leaning on the wall of—wherever he is, whatever tunnel this is, he stumbles forward. Step, by step, by step...

...and finally sets foot on bright grass, sunlight and grime on his face, and silence from the audience.

It's not long before the last part changes into a resounding roar that rings in his ears as much as the minefield explosions did.

Izuku stumbles a little further in before collapsing on the ground and rolling so that he's face-up, bile in his throat that he has to swallow to not make a fool of himself on live television. He is *never* doing that again.

Tommy so desperately wants to scream in joy and also rightful anger for Izuku doing something as reckless as that. He's just. *So* fucking close to running out on that field himself and either slapping him on the back for a job well done, or slapping him on the head for being so. Fucking. Stupid.

Every hero here in whatever fucking booth this is looks astonished. Toshinori looks like he had a Prime-damned *heart attack*.

The number-one pro hero looks at Tommy, as if to ask "did you teach him that?"

Tommy only mouths a hard and *very* clear "fuck no" back in English.

...The feeling in Tommy's gut hasn't gone away.

Chapter End Notes

1. um!! if i haven't clarified this in prev. chapters (honestly can't remember,) bnha's gold is different from minecraft's gold. minecraft's gold has been affected by goldly drama; bnha's gold, like the modern world, hasn't. so, that's why he hasn't crafted any gapples with bnha's gold—because it doesn't work. [\[return to text\]](#)

've added this as a tiny detail in rising dawn, so!!

2. sam's put like those privacy screen protectors for phones but better, to where only the owner of the communicator can see what's on it. how? idk, prolly lots of small, intricate redstone and command blocks and shit [\[return to text\]](#)

—happy birthday, toms.

Chapter Notes

this would be this fic's 1-year anniversary chapter, but since i published this fic to ao3 later than wattpad and it hasn't caught up, i kinda delayed it for the placement of this to make sense,,,,,, apologies, but i didn't want to make this out of place orz

speaking of placement, the placement for this in a timeline would be between the days of the prep. for the sports festival; 's up to you to determine if it's canon or not for this fic

there are mentions of techno in this. if you skip the nightmare sequence, you'll avoid most of them

finally: this'll be the final update for a bit, as this is the last piece of pre-written content i've made/published. the recent news of cc!techno's still affecting me and my feelings abt writing this, so,, yeah

this isn't discontinued!!! it'll just be on a hiatus until i update—not as long of a hiatus like what the poor wattpaders have been goin through ('m so sorry) but yeah

n e way!! please enjoy this

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy wakes up to someone jostling him. He can tell who it is—the texture of their palms isn't calloused like Techno's or Phil's, nor is it small like Tubbo's, so it must be...

"...Wilbur?" Tommy grumbles, stubbornly squeezing his eyes closed. He curls under the safety of the blankets over him a little longer, to hold on to the warmth that clings to it and him. The hand shaking him only gets more insistent, so Tommy cracks an eye open to a mostly-dark room, just barely registering the darkened figure of—yeah, he guessed right, it was Wilbur. "Wha' the fuh's goin' on...?"

"Get up, get up, get up!" Wilbur whisper-shouts, practically ripping the blanket off of him. Tommy's eyes shoot open as he lets out a yelp at the sudden cold ~~that takes and takes, devouring him whole until there is nothing left but the void only Death can give.~~

"What?!" Tommy groggily whisper-shouts as he reluctantly sits up, sleep still hazing his mind. Instead of standing, he just glares up at the older brunet who's currently tossing the poor blanket on the ground far away. The ground! First throwing the blanket around, and then waking Tommy up at probably ass-'o'-clock in the morning, and now this! What disrespect! "What's fuckin'—what's going on?!"

Wilbur doesn't answer, looking at him with a—smile? Yeah, seems like it, though this one's more wider than usual. It's ~~just like His, just like Dream's, leave, leave, LEAVE~~—too dark to really see what was truly on his face. He strides off without another word, exclaiming, "Let's go, child!"

Sighing quietly, Tommy looks at Tubbo across the room. The brunet's sleeping soundly, snoring so loudly it could possibly shake the walls. They're mostly soundproof anyway due to this exact reason,

Tommy does not pout, nor is he ever envious as to how Tubbo sleeps so soundly through everything. He isn't, truly, because Tommy is the biggest man ever.

Horns curl around Tubbo's head, the left cracked as if broken ruthlessly. A ring is around the other, the simple gold band glinting off of the light coming through the ajar door of the room. There's a crown of flowers nestled into his hair, mixing gradients of purples and blues and reds, but only a lone yellow flower is tucked behind his ear. His—goat ears...

On the sleeve Tommy's facing, there is a plethora of more flowers embroidered in that crawl down, small by the shoulder, exploding into bloom near the junction of his forearm and upper arm, and closing in near the wrist. The brunet shifts, and Tommy can see a—a small gun that glints underneath his coat and through the fur layers. And when—when Tommy takes a sharp inhale, it smells of gunfire and smoke and nuclear radiation.

Tubbo's eyes snap open to give him a blank expression with a blinded eye, the other one with a nuke symbol for a pupil. The stench of radiation grows stronger, and—Prime, is that nuclear eye fucking—glowing?

—he blinks. Tubbo... isn't looking at him anymore. In fact, he's... his back's turned to Tommy again, like nothing had happened. He's in his bee pajamas still, yellow hues overly bright even in the dark room.

1) $\langle [C_{\alpha\beta} - f] \alpha_{\alpha\beta}^2 \rangle = 0$

...What was the hallucination again?

A chilling fear sweeps through him like the coldest of winters in a tundra he could've called home. Faintly, Tommy smells gunmetal and radiation.

No, no—maybe he doesn't want to know.)

Sighing again, Tommy hastily slips off of the bed, wincing at the creaky floorboards that sound when his feet lightly press on them. He reaches to the blanket on the ground without moving further from the bed, fingertips just barely grazing the fabric whilst his other hand grips the mattress like a lifeline. With the set of his brow and a determined huff, Tommy snags the blanket with his index finger, tugging it back like that and wearing it over his shoulders like a cape. He grins triumphantly.

Tommy soon moves his feet to the non-creaky side of the floor, stepping on it with feather-light feet. With caution, he moves out the bedroom and into the corridor; a glance to one of the entrances shows that someone's turned on the lights for that area, most likely Wilbur.

The teenager silently huffs, subconsciously biting his nails. The fuck does he want, at—Tommy glances at the clock on the wall—fucking... twelve in the morning? What the fuck?

Wilbur usually sleeps at ten in the afternoon and wakes at three because of his fucked sleeping schedule. Tommy and Tubbo are hyperactive in the morning only because they drink Phil's coffee when he isn't looking, and then they pass out at about nine and wake up at six.

Really, Techno should be the only one up right now because his sleeping schedule's just as bad; only Phil is the most responsible when it comes to sleep out of all of them. Not saying that Tommy isn't responsible—Phil is just Philza Minecraft.

Tommy grips the ends of the blanket he holds tighter. ~~Reflected in the orange light, his skin looks too pale, a slight blue tinge under it.~~

~~He's cold.~~

He shakes his worries away—a little literally, what with how he can't help but roll his shoulders a bit to get a good stretch in. (...Why was he worried in the first place?)

Striding into the lit room, Tommy hisses quietly at the orange-ish light that blasts his face. He curses, blinking rapidly as his arms shoot up to cover his eyes. When he thinks he can finally look up, Tommy does, squinting his eyes in suspicion as his vision clears. "What the fuck," he begins, "are you planni —"

Tommy stops. "Is that—are those baking ingredients?"

Wilbur, clad in his yellow sweater and loose pants and currently setting a bag of flour on the table, practically whips his head towards Tommy. However, the blond's too busy staring at everything else—the mixer or beater or whatever, the bowls, the pans, the non-stick shit, the tools...

Tommy looks at the paper near the tools. It's written with a shit-ton of loops and elegance, like imperfect calligraphy. ~~Even after so long, he can still recognize the handwriting Wilbur's shoved in his face so often back when they were whole.~~

He snorts. "So Sally told you what you needed, eh?"

Wilbur's face turns into a red tomato. "Shut up!" The simp hisses, his hand snatching the paper out of sight. "How'd you even tell she wrote that, you gremlin child?"

"You should really hide those poetic love-letters you've been sending to her before someone else besides me and Tubbo finds 'em, y'know," Tommy says casually, face morphing into a grimace. "You're so incredibly... affectionate, that I almost threw up when I first read them. I mean, 'my love for you is as insurmountable as the stars and the skies?' You kidding with that shit? And then there's all the letters she sends you, oh my Prime don't even get me started—"

Wilbur sniffs pointedly even though his face looks like it's gonna burst from embarrassment. "I guess I'm not helping you make a cake, raccoon child," he says, and Tommy immediately shuts up. Not for long, however.

"Cake?!" He soon exclaims with a grin, rushing over. "We're baking cake?!"

Wilbur smirks. "Don't say a word about what me and Sally send in our letters and I'll help you do this shit."

"I'm perfectly fine by myself, thank you very—"

Wait. If Wilbur's here, maybe their combined forces would make the cake faster than compared to if he was alone.

...He also didn't say that Tubbo couldn't tell people.

"Never mind! 'S a deal," Tommy decides, holding a hand up. Wilbur takes a look at his face and looks weary, but he still grasps it anyway, and they shake on it.

Tommy lets go first, adjusting the blanket and rubbing his hands together in excitement. They haven't had cake in—in... forever, ever since... ever since Kristen... ~~died. Just like you, T—~~

No. There's no need to think about that now. It's—She's still a sore spot for all of them, and Tommy can't ruin this moment.

So he doesn't. He beams instead, making it as genuine as he can.

"Well," he says, ripping the flour bag open and coating his hands with flour. "What are you waiting for, bitch boy?" Tommy smirks, whirling to Wilbur and throwing the loose flour that clings to his hands to the brunet's face. Like intended, it strikes near the bridge of his nose and gets on his glasses. Some of it actually gets into the other's currently-open mouth because the brunet was probably gonna reprimand him for tearing the bag open like that.

Watching Wilbur sputter and choke on flour while also desperately cleaning his glasses with the hem of his sweater is so, so fucking funny.

Wilbur shoves his hand in the flour too, a calm smile on his face that his twitching eyebrow says otherwise about. It's entirely ruined by the flour around Wilbur's mouth, the stains on his sweater, and the white specks in his hair. "Oh you fucking gremlin," he says after spitting the flour out, which, ew, "I'm going to ~~kill you—~~"

Tommy freezes. "What—?"

Wilbur splays flour on his face before he can ask, and the comment is forgotten as Tommy absolutely does not shriek, but does retaliate with a larger handful of flour.

Tommy leans on the counter, exhausted out of his mind as the oven whirls in the background. Wilbur slumps next to him, seemingly just as tired. Both of them are caked in flour, bits of egg shells, a little sugar, and then some. Maybe some frosting here and there, too, even though the cake (the recipe had turned out to be for velvet cake) wasn't even done. Tommy can't even find the recipe under this mess they've made.

Flinging the dollop of frosting, flour, and bits of egg at Wilbur's face with the spoon (or the best makeshift slingshot ever) was amazing, alright?

~~It had felt so easy, to aim it at his face, at his heart, at his neck. Too easy.~~

~~Tommy's hands shake imperceptibly.~~

He glances at the clock. 3:42, it reads.

Ah. Maybe that's why he feels so exhausted. ~~Maybe it was the blanket he still holds; maybe it tethers him to this world too much. He should be dead—~~

"You..." Tommy starts, out of breath. He picks up the blanket, now partially slathered with flour, and sets it around his shoulders again despite its stains. "You need to exercise more, big man."

Wilbur gasps, offended, a flour-caked hand reaching up to hover over his sweater where his heart should be. "I'm perfectly fine the way I am, child!"

Tommy disregards the mock-annoyance the child comment brings in favor of using it against Wilbur. "If I'm a child... but you're just as out of breath as me... then what does that make you, huh?"

Wilbur falls silent, gaping at him like a stupid fish.

Tommy smirks. "Exactly, you wanker."

"Oh I'll show you who's a wanker you motherfucker—"

They lather the white frosting on the cake generously when it's done baking, or when they've stopped brawling enough to notice. Bits of flour fall from their arms like mist, and they have to pluck out some egg shell bits which fucks up the frosting. That causes them to have to apply another layer to cover it up because neither of them are precise enough to smooth it out well with the tools they have. There's still some bits of flour that fall on top, though, and really, because they just kept stacking frosting, the one-layered "cake" looks like an igloo now, but who the fuck cares?

...They only cleaned up enough of the kitchen to even cover the cake, too, but that doesn't matter!

Tommy licks some of the frosting off of the frosting spreader or whatever it's called, pointedly ignoring Wilbur's disgusted look. It was store-bought, but frosting's frosting, and the sweetness makes

him grin. "So what now, big man?" Tommy asks.

Wilbur's already shuffling through the knife drawer. "What else, gremlin?" He says, holding a knife towards him ~~and it morphs into a sword and he is dead, dead, dead—~~ "Let's cut the cake!"

This is exactly when Techno finds them, followed by Phil. The winged man stops, a look of pure despair on his face. "What the fuck happened here?!" He practically shouts, but there's a choked-off laugh somewhere woven into it.

Wilbur looks at him and unabashedly does a silent "ta-da!" motion. Tommy follows with a grin. "We did! Sorry, Phil," the brunet unapologetically smiles.

The piglin hybrid, on the other hand, raises an eyebrow questioningly, looking at Wilbur, and the brunet seems to mouth something. Tommy frowns; unfortunately, he can't read lips, so they just look like idiots. Phil seems to know, though, because his faux-despair expression grows to a genuinely happy one, and his wings shift in a way that shows that joy.

"What? What's going on?" Tommy questions, frowning when Phil goes off to a random but specific direction to—something. Techno's put himself on one of the chairs to the dining table, toying with his long pink hair.

Wilbur brings the "cake" to the center table, setting the knife next to it. "Nothing, child," he practically sing-songs with a smirk.

Tommy protests with "I'm not a fucking child!" Nothing else he could've said would've given him an answer anyway, what with the look on Wilbur's face. So, he turns to Techno.

"Techno, my man, my bestest brother," he drags out, leaning towards the man who moves away in faux-annoyance.

In his peripherals, Wilbur gasps dramatically. "So you're just making Techno take my place?" He grumbles.

Tommy ignores him, even as the brunet sighs and follows Phil out. "Let me in on your secret code!"

Techno pretends to think for a moment. "Nah," he says in the end. Tommy grumbles something intelligible. "You'll figure it out soon anyway, Theseus."

"But I want to know now!" Tommy isn't being a petulant child, it's just that they're all being secretive and shit! Who wouldn't want to know what's going on?

Techno still doesn't give him an answer, bringing out a book from Prime-knows-where and casually flipping to a bookmarked page. Tommy leans over, aiming to snatch it away, but Techno's easily able to maneuver it out of his reach with his long fucking arms.

Tommy huffs, crossing his arms and leaning back into his seat. "You all are wankers and bitches."

"Mhm."

"This is stupid. Why can't I know about what you all are talking about?"

"S top secret."

"Mmm, maybe it's 'cause you all are lower than me, so you have to use a special code that I can't figure out to be on a little more of an advantage. That's absolutely fucking it, actually, because I'm the biggest man ever."

"Yep."

"Why did Wilbur want to make a cake anyway? Why did he force me to help out? D'you know why, Techno?"

"Nah."

"...I'm eating all the cake without you or Phil or Wilbur."

"Nope," Techno says, promptly dragging the cake away from Tommy's grasp before going back to his book. "Not yet." Tommy does not pout because he is better than this, but he does scowl.

Phil files back in, holding a pack of—candles? Yeah, a pack of candles, and a candle-lighter, too. He looks content and happy, setting it on the table as his wings flutter.

Tommy narrows his eyes. Candles?

"Wait, who's birthday is it?" He asks curiously, tilting his head to the side.

Phil looks at him. "...Mate," he says slowly, "you still don't know?"

Tommy tilts his head further. "...Am I supposed to?"

They have a staring contest. Tommy is not a quitter, so he, obviously, doesn't lose. Phil's the one to exasperatedly but fondly look away and to the doorway, anyway. ~~It's all fake all fake all fake all—~~

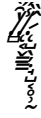
"Yours, idiot!" Wilbur exclaims from the doorway, dragging wrapped red boxes of all sizes towards them. He stacks them all in a few piles dotted around the room. Tommy squints at them; they seem to be wrapped professionally. None of them could ever wrap boxes like that.

Tommy ~~finches~~ blinks, and between one moment and the next, Phil and Techno have both put on about seventeen candles on the top of the frosting mound, all soon lit aflame, the lights have been flicked off by the courtesy of Wilbur; and Tommy can only look in bewilderment as they all settle around the table.

"...Oh," he says, and Phil laughs, loud and warm. Tommy still shifts the blanket around his shoulders anyway. ~~That laugh sends a shiver down his spine, making him acutely aware of every exit in the room.~~

"...Wait," he adds, "if it's my birthday, why didn't we wake Tubbo?"

He's... ignored.



What was he ignored about?

Oh, no matter, Tommy can remember it later.

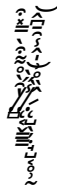
"Happy birthday to you," Phil begins with a quiet, light clap on his hands, creating the underlying beat to the song as a wide grin grows on his face.

"Happy birthday to you," Wilbur sings, a soft smile on his lips. ~~It stretches so unnaturally on his skin.~~

Techno's set his book down, but he looks to the side and pointedly away from Tommy. Wilbur and Phil stare him down until he finally relents, saying in his signature American baritone, "...Happy birthday dear Theseus..."

In sync, they finish with, "Happy birthday to you!"

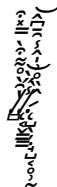
Tommy grins, large and boyish and bright. He blows the candles out simultaneously, soon plucking all the candles on with haste and practically throwing them on the table as Wilbur turns the lights on again. Grabbing the knife and carefully carving a slice out from the top, Tommy slips the knife under and pulls said slice out, and—



—and it's—



—it's a—



—it's a gaping cavity walled with frosting that's filled with a beating heart.

Tommy's hands shake visibly as he continues pulling the "slice" out, exposing the organ more and more, practically tumbling from its frosting confines. Blood spills; velvet lines drip down, down, down, tainting the knife under it a disgusting, nauseating red. The frosting around it crumples with nothing to support it, white against violent red.

"...What...?" His voice wobbles. His fingers almost drop the knife. "Wilbur, did we—did we mess up or some shit?"

"...Yes," Wilbur says, but his voice is—different, "I think we did, Toms."

(Not right not right not right, none of this was ever right—)

Tommy turns towards his brother, and with a blink, he is met with only stone, and he is standing on bent, wobbly knees with cuts littered all over his skin. His limp fingers wield a bloodied sword in his hand that's skewered someone's heart out—no. No. A sword that was in the process of ripping someone's heart out. Tommy doesn't look at the victim—he can't bear to, when it'd only make his shaking hands and panicked heart worse.

Distantly, as he looks up and sees someone—sees Wilbur—Tommy thinks that seeing the victim would be a thousand times less terrifying than him.

Wilbur is not in a soft yellow sweater with a ragged old beanie anymore, but shouldering a dirtied, bloodied coat that billows in the smoke and gunfire. Dirtied bandages littered across his exposed skin save for his hands, calloused and fingers covered in grime. Even through his cracked glasses Tommy can see the maniac gleam in his visible eye, dyed as crimson as the blood painted on Tommy's skin.

The surrounding presents morph, and—

Explosions ring out—

—from all sides,

as the wrapped "presents—"

—explode—

on—

—impact.

Tommy screams, assaulted with the backlash of being in close vicinity of the bundles without armor. It sears his skin, make the air unbearably thick and warm and burning, cut him with shrapnel and debris, and synchronize with the screams of innocents, guilty, and in-between around them.

He moves on instinct, ducking under larger chunks of debris and hunching in on himself as the explosions keep ringing and ringing and ringing. They shake the ground, simultaneous with Tommy's trembling body. Billows of dust cloud the air and make him choke, though the debris does block most of it.

When Wilbur speaks, however, Tommy can't help but forgo his safety in turn for paying attention to him. To this—terrorist. (To what he could've prevented, if Tommy had cared more. If he'd paid attention. If they all had.)

"Because L'Manburg was never meant to be, in the end." Wilbur states, voice clear among the chaos. He's grinning with sharp, bloodied teeth as he delights in his reckoning. Spitting out blood on the rocky floor he stands on, the brunet holds his hands out and wide, like a composer beginning a song. "An unfinished symphony—no, a hidden cacophony in the making! Our own specialized hell! We should've known, Toms; safe havens don't exist for a world as wicked as this—for people as wicked as us."

Tommy can't breathe. His heart falls with every explosion, with every gunshot, with every death—with every piece of L'Manburg that collapses with it.

He turns around to see a glimpse of pink hair, a flash of black wings, a hiss from Withers that promise death and despair, and—

For a moment, Tommy is in Exile again. For a moment, Tommy is in ripped clothes and covered in fresh, overlapping burn scars, dirty bandages loose and hanging from his thin arms. He sits in front of a long birch table with plates on the sides and cutlery wrapped in clean napkins, shaking hands clutching the hem of his tattered shirt.

The sudden environment change makes his head whirl, the surrounding quiet emphasizing the screams and bloodshed and explosions that ring in his head.

It is overwhelming, the silence that fills the atmosphere. As if in this place, the world has died. As if this, after all is cleared and bodies decompose and life moves on, is the aftermath of Doomsday, even though Exile happened before it.

Dream is smiling at him from across the table, the damned bastard. He unwinds the napkin holding the cutlery and digs into his cake slice, as if nothing is wrong.

The—the cake slice...

Time slows; life stops. Or maybe, in Exile, neither had ever existed in the first place.

Tommy takes a look at the center of the table.

There's a velvet cake covered in white frosting in front of him.

A slice is already served on his plate, more servings passed to people who never came, and Tommy feels the gut-wrenching urge to hurl—

And then, he's in Pandora's Box, the recognition as quick as being cut by the remains of a bomb from a resounding explosion. The brief sounds of sloshing sea waves against the shore and the passing wind are nullified, but the silence that replaces them is just as choking.

Oh Prime, he's in Pandora's Box again.

*Tommy dry-heaves like he's throwing his organs out. His lungs hurt, his gut hurts—
Prime, everything hurts. There's nothing in his stomach because in his time in this cell the food sent*

had become more sparse, but Tommy keeps himself hunched over anyways, if only to deny the other presence near him.

"Fuck," Tommy harshly breathes at the end of it, voice hoarse and a small pool of spittle under him. His hands grip his hair; a grounding sensation. (Through the strands he can feel something drip, staining his golden hair, and he rips his hands away and sees blood—but then there isn't, all of it a hallucination, and Tommy resists the urge to laugh, because maybe he's finally going fucking delirious.

It'd be a mercy, but Tommy isn't allowed to have that in his shitty life, apparently.)

He inhales the phantom-smoke and faux-sea-breeze, exhaling all of his fear, and it permeates the air, his terror, turning it suffocating and tense. "Fuck...!" His eyes dart around—obsidian walls, dim glowstone, the meager furniture, the lava that burns behind him, and Prime, it's all there, fuck, it's all there—

Dream is in front of him, smiling so wide Tommy can see it through his cracked mask. "It worked," the man says, revered, gleeful, obsessed—deranged. "It—It fucking worked!"

He laughs, not his usual wheeze, but a cackle of someone going drunk with power. Tommy shudders, staggering backwards and collapsing to his knees, twitching hands gripping his hair tighter (even if there's blood—but there isn't, there never was, stop imagining things—) His grip almost rips the blond strands out with how tight it is, but Tommy's world is collapsing and falling and shattering and the pain every time he tugs is the only thing keeping him from caving in, too.

"Do you know what this means, Tommy?!" Dream laughs and laughs and laughs and— "This means I'm a deity!"

"I—" Tommy chokes, "I—"

"And you know what I can do now?" He croons, leaning over Tommy, as his instincts scream get away getawayGETAWAY—

"I can kill you." Dream quietly states, smiling wider with every word that irons itself into the fabrics of Tommy's reality. "And then I can revive you. I can kill you and then revive you and kill you and revive you over and over and over again until you become nothing but a husk of yourself. And you cannot do anything back because I am a god, and you cannot go against a deity."

"And you know what?" Dream sounds a lot closer now. Tommy can barely look through his tears and shaking hands, but forces himself to look up, even when he needs to run, needs to get away, move, Prime-damn-it, MOVE—

Dream holds a bloodied potato over him with a smile.

"Let's start the cycle, shall we?"

He slams—

—the potato—

down—!

Tommy lurches up at an angle, narrowly dodging to the right. Surprisingly, there is no one on top of him, so he ends up toppling down whatever he was laying on, the yellow blanket over his body falling with. His mind flashes with memories of soft yellow sweaters and ragged beanies and—he *twists*, body writhing, throwing the fabric aside frantically.

Tommy staggers to his feet, flicking his inventory open with a hand as he rids the taste of bile in his throat, as his eye throbs and *throbs* and—

He—he needs to kill Dream, Dream who's going to kill him again, no no no—

Tommy *swings* the weapon he's equipped randomly, surprised at its weight as well as how there's no impact and almost tumbling over. He gets his balance back just as his shaking fingers slip, the weapon clattering off to the side, so he snarls, and his eye glances around desperately—door, window, shelves, light—

...Window?

Tommy chokes on a sudden, desperate breath, his instincts going on hyper-drive. Where is he—what is this place—needs to get out—Dream where's Dream where's—where is—he?

Clutching his chest, Tommy grasps at his heart, at his hyperventilating lungs. His hands shake, and whatever thing he subconsciously equipped drops to the ground—the floor with a *clack*, and—and where is he? This isn't Pandora's Box, this isn't—isn't Exile, this isn't Doomsday, where is he?

Tommy forces himself to breathe, even as his chest feels like it's rattling, like it's a grenade he just pulled the trigger of and it's going to explode, and he can feel every painful contrast and contract of his lungs. He can barely get any breath down long enough to savor it, to savor that he's still living.

(He shouldn't be able to breathe. Tommy is dead, has been for a long time. Tommy has felt himself die, eye caved in and bleeding out in a dead, dark prison cell made by someone he'd fucking *trusted*. This is all futile; denial is futile. Dead, he is *dead*, he should be—)

It takes a long, long time of him just breathing in and out, and even longer for him to focus without his mind slipping into numbness. Tommy finally opens his eye to see his couch he was sleeping on, the blanket he'd pulled up a messy heap on the ground, and a staff near that pile as well as one across the room. There's a fresh dent in the wall above the staff he'd probably flung.

Ah. This is the teacher's lounge—or his area in U.A. Not his house. Must've taken a nap after school or something. Thank Prime this place soundproof; Tommy's throat feels raw, so he was... not screaming, no—*yelling*, he was *yelling*. Tommy Innit does not scream, ever.

...Tommy takes a tired, tired sigh, slowly picking everything up with sluggish movements. He stuffs the two staffs in his inventory and the blanket on the couch, untidy.

Fuck tidiness. He's just—he's so, so tired.

He won't be able to sleep anymore, though. Not with a nightmare like that. Yes, he's had nightmares plenty of times, but—they... they haven't been *this* intense before.

What can he even do now? Most of the school, it's gotta be locked up for security purposes or something. Maybe the gyms are open, but he just—Tommy can't deal with silence, right now. Can't deal with fighting, either.

It's pathetic. It's fucking stupid.

(Just like whatever shit-show his involvement in this server is. Tommy should be *dead*.)

Tommy sighs again. He exits his room and moves on instinct, trudging through the halls with an empty mind as everything starts shutting down.

tommy ends up in the wildlife habitats piled with animals at d-1. he doesn't know exactly how long he's been here, drifting. he doesn't know when he got here.

originally it'd just been clementine who'd offered her side to rest on immediately after taking one look at him, the intelligent girl she is. but then some cats or dogs had snuggled into his sides, a few birds had nestled into his hair, and now here he was, covered in fur, feathers, and maybe scales of all kinds. their soft breaths fill the otherwise silent enclosure.

(he doesn't feel claustrophobic. maybe. he isn't too sure about anything anymore. but, tommy doesn't feel like shredding his skin into pieces, and the walls aren't closing in. he feels a little safer than he would if he wasn't here. that has to mean something.)

it feels like summer, surrounded by this warmth, even when everything feels discordant. sweat clings to tommy's skin like another skin.

it feels like summer, but tommy still feels dead. at least it's lessened compared to if he were by himself outside.

"...so this is where you've been," a familiar drawling voice says. the scent of coffee fills the room, albeit muted. tommy shifts carefully so as to not disrupt all the animals' impromptu naps, making it so that his eye can see the outsider.

the figure is warping. they're decked in black. there's a bit of gray. who are they, again?

black, gray. shades of pale skin. (tommy blinks, and it looks like the skin of a dead man. the skin he wears.)

"aizawa," he's finally able to acknowledge, sluggishly piecing the other's appearance. tommy's voice sounds hoarse even to himself, and his mouth feels like dead leather, so he doesn't smile in greeting like he may have before—he thinks. he could've smiled in spite of that. regardless, the underground hero nods to tommy in turn, taking a small sip of his presumably freshly-brewed coffee.

"what brought you here?"

tommy can't bring himself to respond.

"need help getting out?"

he shakes his head.

"alright. how long have you been here?"

a shrug.

aizawa grunts, getting to tommy's level by sitting crisscross on the ground. the man doesn't get his sleeping bag out, surprisingly. he just sits there, sipping his coffee, letting some of the animals just surround him.

"it's twelve thirty-seven," he states, scratching a cat between the ears as it purrs. "you missed most of the classes."

tommy hums, a bit of hazy regret filling his mind. izuku must be panicking out of his mind right now.

"don't feel like moving?"

after swallowing, tommy replies. "nah." it still sounds a bit off. at least it's an improvement.

"that's fine. you need food?"

tommy's stomach growls. "...probably."

"you wanna get out of your pile, or?"

the thought of getting up brings a feeling that he thinks is nausea. everything feels too off; he can barely discern that from the feeling of just existing. "nah."

aizawa shrugs, more so to stretch, petting the cat one last time. he gets up, one of his knees cracking, and seemingly downs the rest of his drink. "i'll bring food here," he says, already walking away. tommy's eye returns back to staring at the ceiling unseeingly while his mind continues to try and piece itself back together.

When he's able to be back in reality again, Aizawa's nudging the rim of a plate to his cheek. A delicious aroma wafts from the plate; a quick glance reveals that it's curry paired with a small, fluffy heap of rice. It looks warm.

There's significantly less animals on him now. Clementine's still there on her side, patient. There's a bunny nestled against his leg. A cat's sprawled itself across his thigh.

Aizawa leaves the plate there near his head, holding a small black box himself. Probably a home-made bento. He sits down again and begins to eat as if nothing's different.

"Why're you still here?" Tommy asks. He still doesn't move.

Aizawa answers bluntly, like most times. That's what Tommy likes about the man. He doesn't bullshit things like everyone else would (like himself), doesn't surround himself in lies for a double-edged protection. However, it does catch him off-guard this time.

He says, "You look terrified."

Tommy doesn't know how to respond to that, so he doesn't. Instead, he forces himself into an upright sitting position, ending up with his legs crossed over each other. "Thank you," he tells Clementine, who moos, before licking him a few times on his arm. He sets the plate of warm food on his crossed legs, and, after a moment of just staring blankly, takes a bite.

It tastes like what the "cake" would've, if he'd taken a bite. It tastes like ash and gunpowder, too.

He eats the rest of the curry, avoiding the rice, and feels it rot in his stomach like the rest of him.

"It was a nightmare," Tommy says after a period of silence, Aizawa still sitting there even after he's finished his bento box.

The other acknowledges it with a grunt. "Want to talk about it?" He asks.

"No. Not really." Sighing, Tommy leans back, looking up at the ceiling. "'S stupid shit I haven't gotten over. Birthday special, I suppose." He fakes a smile blatantly, and jokes, "Velvet cake is the worst, zero-out-of-ten. Any cake is shit, actually. Don't recommend it. The presents were just as shitty."

The underground hero raises a brow. "It's your birthday?"

"...What's today again?"

"The twenty-first of April."

"Not really, then. It's twelve days late. Maybe my mind's just fucking with me for fun."

Tommy considers his words for a moment. "...Damn," he murmurs, mostly to himself. "I'm eighteen."

Aizawa frowns, looking at him weirdly. "What?" Tommy snaps, looking right back. The man says nothing.

Suppressing a shiver at the sharp stare, Tommy hastily grabs his half-eaten food and forces himself to stand. Clementine chuffs in agitation at the abrupt movement, but Tommy can only feel a little regret over his skin crawling. "Just—let's go back," he decides, trying not to run away. "Lunch's probably almost over."

"...Right," Aizawa says, a weird tone in his voice as he follows. Tommy walks faster.

Tommy's only able to stay in Class 1-A for one more period before fleeing back to his lounge.

(They're too alive. He can't help but compare the way they live with how he should be cold and decaying.)

Izuku, after school and wearing casual, light clothing, finds Tommy in his lounge and promptly drags him out. Tommy doesn't really know why he's taking the initiative for something, but it's gotta be serious with how determined Izuku looks.

"Where are we going, Big Man?" He asks. Tommy tried to put more enthusiasm or playfulness into it like he'd usually would, but it sounds too little and forced anyway.

"We," he declares, "are going to an arcade with some of the others."

What's an arcade? Tommy almost asks. "Why?" He says instead. "And who are we going with?"

Izuku slows down their pace a little as they exit U.A. "Ashido, Kaminari, Kirishima, Jirou, Tokoyami, and Sero will be there. And as for why... well, w-we can't just be training every single day until the Sports Festival, y'know? We all need a break."

After reconsidering his words, Izuku's step stutters, almost causing him to trip. He turns around to Tommy, and if he wasn't basically pulling Tommy around right now, he bets that Izuku would be gesturing wildly before covering his flustered face. "N-Not that I'm saying that you're pushing us too hard or anything! After all, the S-Sports Festival's a-a major event that decides a lot of the c-course of our futures!

"But..." Here, Izuku's grip loosens a little, and he gives Tommy a small smile as they pause on the rocky path of U.A.'s front leading road. "We can spare a little bit of our time on fun, right?"

Tommy... doesn't really get that. Embarrassingly, the idea seems a bit ludicrous even though he would've been up to it a long time ago. The Sport Festival's literally days away. This is practically the *best* time to train, to make sure everyone's fighting skills are the best they can be. It's what everyone on the SMP would've thought.

Once again, he's reminded of how *different* this server is.

"...Alright," Tommy says instead, letting Izuku lead them to their destination.

Izuku leads Tommy into the populated city, weaving through the busy people with relative ease. Subtly, he makes them move through the parts of the city that are less populated to get to their destination. Not once does he ever let go of Tommy's wrist, nor does he tighten his grip.

They stop at a place wedged between a restaurant and a make-up store. **TAITO STATION**, its blaring header says above.

"This should be it," Izuku says, glancing at his phone.

Tommy raises a brow. "What do you mean, 'this should be it?'"

"A-Ah..." The other scratches his head with a sheepish grin. "Well, it's, uh. It's actually my first time here. At an arcade. Have you been to one before?"

"...No."

"It's a first time for both of us then!" Izuku says, already walking in. "Let's make it the best!"

Tommy follows him—and *woah*, holy shit, this place is already fucking weird. Lines of computer booth things are all over the place, and there's lights that blare his fucking eyes with how bright and colorful they are every direction he turns. People chatter and shout excitedly at a lot of the booths, overridden only by a ton of loud speakers blasting game music and sound effects all over the place.

Grimacing, Tommy looks around for anyone in Class 1-A. Izuku does the same.

"Yoho~!" Ashido shouts over the people already there, waving her hands in the air. Her pink color helps Izuku and Tommy find their way over to her, and in turn, the group Izuku had mentioned would be here. All of them wear casual, light clothing. "You made it!"

Tommy frowns. When was this planned?

"That's all of us, right?" Jirou asks, eyes glancing over all of them to do a head-count, probably.

"Yep!" Kirishima exclaims, practically vibrating with energy. Kamimari, who stands next to him, isn't much better. Sero, by contrast, looks relaxed on Kirishima's other side.

"What a mad banquet of darkness," Tokoyami murmurs. He'd have blended in the background if not for the light both from the ceiling and the computer booth screens reflecting off of his dark clothing.

Ashido cheers, "Alright! Let's get this started!" She digs into her pocket, taking out thousands of yen—maybe even a hundred thousand, and then some. Practically everyone's faces morph into one of

shock, but Ashido just laughs. "Momo's given us all of this," she explains, already dividing it. "She's fine with us spending it all!"

Between the eight of them, the one-hundred sixty thousand—yes, *160,000*—yen is cut into twenty-thousand for each person. Tommy does the math in his head; that should literally be about one hundred twenty pounds. For each person. What the *fuck*.

"Is—do we need all of this?" Jirou asks warily. "I mean... each game costs about a hundred yen to play..." *What*. Once again, *what the fuck*. That's like—it's like two-hundred games, innit? For *each* person.

"We probably don't!" Ashido laughs merrily. "But, Momo's too kind—she wouldn't let me refuse. It *does* mean that we can practically play and have fun for however long we want!"

"Well then, what're we waiting for!" Kaminari exclaims, finally bursting from anticipation and excitement. "Let's go!"

A laugh rings out from behind him. Tommy scowls, face flushing a bright red.

"Tommy," Ashido says, incredulous and amused, "you're bad at Dance Dance Revolution?"

"Fuck off!" He shouts, moving himself to cover his shitty score. "There's just too many fucking symbols to follow, alright?!"

Ashido raises her hands in surrender, laughing. She gets onto the other Dance Dance Revolution station to Tommy's left, beginning her own game. "I'm gonna show you how a master does this!"

She gets a fucking Perfect Full Combo first try.

Tommy leaves, ignoring Ashido's teasing, smug smile that she aims at him.

"Oh you fucking *BITCH!*" Tommy screeches, slipping into English curses as he frantically turns his character—Donkey Kong was its name, if he remembers right—wildly. His screen is splattered with inky blots, covering most of the road.

Uncharacteristically, Izuku only laughs, racing ahead and snatching Tommy's first-place position. Tommy's scowl only grows deeper.

Once the ink clears, he grips the arcade wheel with fresh spite before proceeding to take as many shortcuts and speed-boosts he can on the map, even if they're detrimental to his now-third-place position if he messes them up. His placement dips—third, to fourth, to sixth—before it blasts back up, climbing the ranks to second.

He hits an item box just as Izuku's cart briefly appears ahead of him and grins.

Izuku squawks as he's hit with a red shell, Tommy overtaking his rule and becoming first once more.

Now Tommy's the one to laugh in Izuku's face. "Take that, bitch!"

Huffing, Izuku quickly recovers, his character's cart—he chose Luigi—racing forward to clash with Tommy's for first.

In the end, neither of them win. Both of them forgot about the CPU that filled in for the other players, and Peach ends up in first, with Tommy and Izuku at a close second and third respectively. If the latter had been a little faster, he would've beaten Tommy to second.

"Truce?" Tommy asks, staring at the leader-board.

Izuku, in a similar trance, says, "Yeah."

"Want to retry, except as long as one of us beats Peach, we win?"

Izuku nods, already starting another game.

Thus, the *Mario Kart Armistice* is sealed.

That game, Peach doesn't get first—but Yoshi does. Tommy ends up as fifth, and Izuku as third. The *Mario Kart Armistice* is revised to include the dinosaur menace.

Finally, in the subsequent revenge game against both CPUs, Izuku ends up as first and Tommy as second. Peach and Yoshi get sixth and ninth respectively.

Tommy gives Izuku a high-five as they both cheer in glorious victory.

...Yet Izuku, the *backstabber*, soon grins, and shreds the *Mario Kart Armistice* with three words: "I still win."

"You *MOTHERFUCKER*—"

After beating Izuku twice in Mario Kart again with pure spite as fuel, Tommy finds Tokoyami playing *Taiko no Tatsujin*, Dark Shadow doing the same on the other drum right next to him. They're both doing pretty well, probably. The latter spots Tommy, before some sort of determination crosses its gaze. It starts playing better than it had before, soon getting more Perfects than Tokoyami.

That causes an equal reaction from Tokoyami, surprisingly enough. Both of them start playing better when they notice the other is getting ahead until Tommy thinks that both of them are try-hardening.

It's actually amazing to some extent, considering how fast the beats are going.

In the end, Dark Shadow wins with the most Perfects overall, puffing up and huffing a victorious little "heh!" It preens in delight, peering at Tommy expectantly.

"...Uh?" Tommy eloquently says. "Good job for winning, dude. 'Dude' being gender neutral."

Dark Shadow's still looking at him, even though its eyes brighten.

"Do you... want an apple?"

It beams greatly; ironic, considering its name.

Tommy shrugs, popping his inventory open and taking a spare apple out. He tosses it into the air, but not too high. Dark Shadow darts out, catching the fruit with its teeth. "Han' 'ou!" It caws through a full mouth.

"Dark Shadow!" Tokoyami chastises, feathers fluffed out.

"Hat?" It replies, swallowing the fruit whole.

"Dark Shadow—you can't just—this is an *arcade*!"

"Tommy still gave me the apple though!" It whines. Ah, that's definitely his cue to run.

The blond immediately darts off and into the crowds, thankful that his legs are longer since he's taller, but bemoaning his blond hair that makes him stick out like a fucking sore thumb.

Slamming the small hammer down, Tommy watches the strongman game's meter glow up and up and up...

It hits the top, even going beyond a little and giving him more points. He smirks in delight, already moving to collect his tickets, when—

"Oh! That looks cool!" Kirishima exclaims nearby. Tommy flinches, whirling towards the redhead who's already smiling apologetically. "Sorry! Do you mind if I try whacking this?"

"...Yeah, sure, Big Man. Give it your best shot." Tommy gives the short hammer to the redhead—well, Kirishima still has to come over because the rope connecting the weapon to the machine was far too short, but whatever.

Kirishima hesitates only a little before slamming the mallet down in the same manner Tommy did; instead this time, the score is higher than Tommy's. "Nice!" He exclaims joyously. The other, however, narrows his eyes.

No fucking *way* is Tommy going to leave Kirishima as mallet-hitting champion. It was *his* title first.

With a newfound drive, Tommy gestures for the hammer to be passed to him. Kirishima does, and, after inputting more money, Tommy crashes the hammer down.

The score is higher than Kirishima's. That just causes the redhead to want to get even *higher*.

In the end, they keep looping like this over and over, until Tommy's almost sure they'd maybe hit a thousand points—and then, they had to be called away. Otherwise, they would've blocked other people who wanted to use it for too long.

They'd wasted three-thousand yen on the thing. Now, Kirishima can't stop boasting about how manly both he and Tommy are, and he thinks that spending that much time and money was *absolutely* fucking worth it, to get acknowledged as the Biggest Man he is.

And, Tommy was the one who got the last highest hit!

Jirou gets a perfect score in Guitar Hero.

Tommy takes one look and promptly turns away. No fucking *way* is he trying that. Jirou can keep that crown.

"Tommy, never play a shooting game with us in sight after today," Kaminari says out of nowhere, Sero nodding in agreement as he spectates. Both Kaminari and Tommy had been playing a game where they'd basically shoot zombies during a post-apocalyptic world and try to survive.

Tommy startles. "What—?"

"You are *far* too cracked at this," the other continues, gesturing to Tommy's score on the current stage. Which was... maybe ten times what Kaminari has. Tommy hasn't missed a zombie or shot a civilian, after all. "I feel *worse* just looking at your side, man! How do you even get that?!"

"Well..." After the showdown in the SMP, the one that he'd faced against Dream with bows, Tommy had immediately begun training himself as much as he could with a bow. His aim turned from marginally good to fucking spectacular, in his opinion.

He doesn't say that, however. "I just got good, bitch," Tommy says instead, haughtily grinning and inclining his head up condescendingly.

Kaminari huffs without heat, adjusting his grip on the plastic arcade gun in his grip. "Let's keep going!" He determinedly declares. "Now I just *gotta* beat you, even if the odds are impossible!"

Kaminari still loses—in fact, he loses three times. Tommy kills hundreds more zombies than him each time.

"I take back what I said about you never playing video games in our sight—more specifically, mine!" He exclaims, soon pointing at Tommy with his near-perfect score. "Every time there's a shooting game and I see you, we're gonna compete! And I'm going to win one day, swear it!"

Tommy snorts, amused. "I'll hold you to it, bitch boy," he says, ignoring Kaminari's resolute expression as he turns back to the game.

"This is the *best* fucking game ever." Pulling the VR headset off to momentarily wipe his forehead, Tommy laughs breathlessly. He grips the controllers in his hands tighter, before slipping the headset back on and choosing another song.

"Of *course* he's cracked at Beat Saber, too," Kaminari grumbles, but it's all lighthearted.

On the other VR headset, Jirou plays another Beat Saber song almost flawlessly. Sero pats Kaminari's back consolingly as the other bemoans what he would've gotten if he'd been playing compared to Tommy and Jirou.

The next time Tommy had seen him, Izuku had a plushie tucked under his arm: a chibi-fied, soft-looking white rabbit. He's sure the younger teen was saying something to him about playing another game with him, but all Tommy could ask was—

"Where the fuck did you get that?"

"O-Oh—this?" Izuku glanced at his plushie with a prideful smile. "At the crane machine! I-I've always wanted one of these little guys; they're as soft as they look!"

With a newfound haste, Tommy demanded, "Take me to it."

A little confusion in his tone that didn't override the curiosity, Izuku had replied, "Alright?"

Now, Tommy's been at the machine for at least twenty minutes, and there's already a multitude of plushies in his inventory: a blue sheep, a spotted cow, a brown ram, and a striped raccoon. Carefully,

Tommy maneuvers the metal claw directly over a blocky black-and-white cat, making the smallest adjustments he can with the stupid fucking joystick.

The claw goes little more to the right—no, no, that's too much. Tommy moves the claw left a little. And forwards, too, but just a smidge.

Carefully calculating the position of the claw to the cat plushie once more, the blond finally presses the button that activates the claw.

It goes down, down, down... Its metal grabbers, or whatever they are, surround the cat entirely before picking it up. With baited breath, Tommy's eye tracks the metal machinery as it moves towards the reward deposit part. Steady, *steady*...

At the last second, the cat plushie fucking slips out, the slippery fucking *bastard*.

"Prime-damn-it!" Tommy curses, slipping into English by accident. He scowls at the face of the plush, spewing a quieter litany of curses no less vulgar. It gets him a few looks, but he's already hyper-focusing on the machine again to even notice.

On the fourth try—the last had been the third—Tommy finally gets the fucking thing. Its magnified eyes that're clearly meant to be adorable only mock him. He scoffs, shoving the thing in his inventory between the ram and the raccoon, and finally backs away with a satisfied smile.

"Tommy!" The mentioned blond startles violently, whipping around to see the voice's owner with a finger hovering over Clara in his inventory. "Oh—sorry..." Ashido smiles apologetically.

Tommy sighs. "S fine," he says, a hand briefly combing through his hair. "What do you want?"

"Okay, so!" She begins, clapping her hands together. "Everyone's planning to leave soon because the arcade's closing."

...It is? Not that Tommy's disappointed, no—it's just felt like a few minutes. How much time has passed?

Before his silent contemplation gets worrying, Tommy responds with, "...Right. And?"^[1]

"So," Ashido draws out, "I've been asking some of the others if they wanna go shopping! So far only Jirou's agreed to come, and I've asked everyone else but you! So... do you wanna come?" She tacks on, "Momo, Jirou, Aoyama, Hagakure, Tsu, and Uraraka will be there as well!"

Tommy frowns, not unkindly. He doesn't really have anything else to do, but there's a particular gleam in Ashido's eye that makes this seem... off.

As if sensing his thoughts, her smile grows wider. "C'mon," she pleads, "it'll be fun!"

Well. Tommy considers it.

Besides training, he doesn't really have much else to do. Training does get boring after a while, too.

"...Alright," Tommy decides, "I'll go."

Ashido cheers, pumping her fist up.

How the *fuck* did Tommy get here.

Ashido gives Tommy another outfit, of which he puts in his inventory. The added weight of even *more* clothes on top of the stacks he must already have is fucking minuscule yet insurmountable simultaneously. It's already gotten to the point where he had to put the plushies he'd won in one of the emptier bags to save space in his inventory...

"Why are we here again?" Tommy questions, Hagakure browsing through a rack of clothes nearby.

"Cause you need more clothes, duh!" The invisible girl says, like it's the most obvious thing in the world. "You can't just keep wearing your red-and-white t-shirt and tan cargo pants, you know? That can't be the only thing you can have; I *refuse* to let that be."

"But—what—is this what you meant by 'shopping,' Ashido?!"

The mentioned girl grins cheekily. "Mostly! Don't worry, we'll shop for other things too—just after this."

Tommy groans, forgoing any dignity. It feels like they've been at this for fucking *hours* already...

"What about these, kero?" Tsuyu asks, holding up another set by the hanger with her tongue. Aoyama looks at the matching pants and shirt with a scrutinizing eye, then at Tommy, then back at the set. "No, no," he decides, looking through the rack where Tsuyu was, "he'd surely fit better with *this* color scheme, right, mademoiselle?"

Tsuyu stares at what Aoyama's chosen before nodding once. "He would," she agrees, putting the set she holds back onto a rack and grabbing the one Aoyama has, promptly shoving that towards Tommy.

"Do you like it?" Tsuyu inquires.

"Uh?" Tommy stares at the clothes, which he can't really tell the difference if compared to the millions of others Ashido, Hagakure, Aoyama, and Tsuyu have pushed in his face. "...Sure?"

Tsuyu drops it in his arms. Reluctantly, he inventories that too.

"But isn't what I wear fine?" Tommy soon questions, glancing at his signature outfit for U.A. It seems enough to him. Why waste money on shit he doesn't need?

"It is," Aoyama concedes, "but that's also the problem: it's just 'fine.' Clothes are a magnificent and freeing form of self-expression! Diversity is *essential*! I swear that you'll feel better when you truly get into wearing clothes that you like, monsieur. And, someone as dazzling as myself needs new outfits every once in a while."

"Don't think we'll forget about you, Uraraka, Jirou," Ashido adds on, index finger pointed at the brunette, who'd been trying to hide her presence. "You're getting clothes too. We all are!"

Jirou tenses, before flustering at the sudden attention on her, her ear jacks holding a dress out. She only hums in response, looking at the opposite direction of the conversation as her hand grabs the dress.

Uraraka twiddles with her fingers. "I-I'm fine with that," she says, but it doesn't really look like she believes that. "But, um... Momo, are you fine with paying for all of this? It's probably expensive..."

Yaoyorozu nods, holding some clothes herself. "My family doesn't mind," she admits, clutching two fancy-looking shirts. She looks at them both, before putting one aside and hugging the other close to her chest. "We have too much money to even know what to do with it. This would barely be a dent in my bank account, really." Quieter, more to herself, she mumbles, "And... my family's glad I'm spending my money on people I consider my friends."

Uraraka, regardless of if she hears the last part or not, hesitantly nods in acceptance. "Then... I can choose what I want, right?" She asks.

Hagakure snorts. "Of course! Go wild!"

They all fucking go *wilder*.

The end price was fucking *insane*. Granted, everyone had gotten at least two articles of clothing for themselves, and Tommy had been given eight, but... holy shit. Tommy's gotten a healthy dose of fear from Yaoyorozu because she paid it all without a second glance.

Nevertheless, Tommy feels like he's gained a few pounds by the time the girls and Aoyama are done due to his inventory being fucking *stuffed with clothes*. There's literally only three slots left in his inventory, and that's including his hotbar! The rest of them don't even need to hold bags; Tommy is their glorified shopping bag deluxe.

"I hate all of you," he huffily proclaims, pacing a little to get used to the new weight.

"No you don't," Ashido denies. "You wouldn't have taught us anything at all in class if otherwise."

"You all fucking owe me, then."

She only hums.

Uraraka looks at him, concerned, along with Jirou. "Is it... is it too much?" The brunette asks.

"No," Tommy immediately replies. "Don't underestimate me—this'll feel normal in no time. Just give it a few minutes. I am the Biggest Man, after all; so obviously, I can handle this."

"If he couldn't," Yaoyorozu adds matter-of-factly, "then he would've given us everything and left by now, yes? That's what Ashido's figured out, too." She looks to Tommy for confirmation.

Tommy only grumbles something incoherent and speeds up his walking pace. "Where are we going next?"

"May I suggest something, kero?" Tsuyu asks. "How about food?"

The last time he'd ate today was... this morning, right? No, wait, he didn't eat in the morning—he ate during lunch, because Aizawa had said he'd skipped most of the classes until he'd came to D-1.

So no breakfast, only lunch, and school had ended at about 15:15. If he assumes that he's been out here for three hours or so...

Wait, had he even had dinner yesterday?

...He can't remember. Usually, he'd keep track somewhat, because food is a delicacy he can afford now, and there's no fucking way he wouldn't abuse it. However, his body's also used to periods of

starvation because of the SMP, so it's both insignificant and important in his mind simultaneously. The nightmare must've messed up whatever balance was there.

"...mmy? You here?" He comes back to focus.

"What?" Tommy so eloquently says.

"Most of us are on board with food," Hagakure recaps. "We were asking if you wanted some, too."

"Uh." Seeing as he can only remember eating lunch in the past couple of days, "Yeah, sure."

"Kay!" Ashido beams. "I was thinking of McDonalds—"

"You kidding?" Jirou interrupts with a questioning raised eyebrow. "Do you know how oily that stuff is? And it doesn't even taste good! It's too processed!"

Uraraka pointedly looks away, lips pursed. Maybe that had been her only food option for a while? It's possible, considering how she'd been hesitant on spending Yaoyorozu's money, as if she was battling between being stingy and splurging. Adding how cheap the food seemed to be from the ads he'd listened to on the radio, back when he was on Takoba beach, and it makes sense.

...Man. That was just a year ago, huh? Tommy shifts his focus back to the current conversation.

Yaoyorozu, who'd looked like she was going to agree with Ashido, slowly closes her mouth with a slightly downtrodden expression. Judging from her eyes widening, the ear jack girl noticed.

"I-I mean," she amends, "Momo, if you want to go, that's fine! We can all come with, and you guys can eat there; I just won't eat. I'll probably just get a soda."

The black haired girl brightens, a smile on her face, before it flattens a little. "Are you sure, Jirou? I just want to go to McDonalds because I've, um. I've never had fast food before, and McDonalds is a popular fast-food joint from what I've heard, so..."

Tommy watches with a little bemusement as Jirou gains a healthy flush to her cheeks. "Y-Yeah!" She stammers out, twirling her ear jack with a finger. "I'm sure!"

"So you've noticed it too!" Hagakure mischievously whispers, Aoyama and Ashido suddenly close enough to nod in agreement as they listen in. It takes all of Tommy's will to not flinch at how close her voice is. "Jirou's totally in love!"

"Seems like it," Tommy murmurs back, doing so without moving his lips. It'd taken a lot of practice to do that. "You probably shouldn't set them up yet, though."

"Why not? And how'd you know I'd do that?"

"Your tone gives it away. Also, this could be a crush. Wait a month or so; if it goes away, then that's that. If not, do whatever."

"Makes sense."

Tommy gently nudges Hagakure away just as Yaoyorozu and Jirou are reminded that they have an audience. Mainly by Tsuyu, who only lets the two girls' conversation go on a little longer before saying, "So... are we going to McDonalds?"

"Ah," Yaoyorozu says, "yes, that is what we have decided on." Jirou nods shyly.

"Alright!" Ashido cheers. "Let's go!"

Just as they're about to enter the restaurant after searching for a bit, Uraraka says, "Wait."

Everyone pauses, turning to look at her. She doesn't falter under their gazes. "I was thinking..." the brunette starts.

Tommy raises an eyebrow.

"Okay, so, as we were walking around, I was looking at the other stores, right? N-Not to detour or anything, but..." Whatever she's going to say is going to be *ingenious*, Tommy knows it is. "Um. Many of them have 'free sample' stands—this doesn't apply to restaurants only, I saw some non-food-related stores and stuff with them. I was thinking... While Momo, Jirou, and Ashido get McDonalds, maybe me, Tsuyu, Hagakure, and Aoyama can get some free stuff?"

Tommy comes to a realization. "You want to steal free shit?!" He whispers.

Immediately, Uraraka goes on the defensive. "N-No, that's not what I—!"

"You innovative mastermind," Tommy goes on with a boyish grin. "I'm in."

"That's actually not a bad idea," Tsuyu decides, nodding once. That only succeeds in flustering Uraraka more.

Hagakure, if she were visible, would be beaming. "Hell yeah!" She exclaims, jumping up and down. It attracts a little attention, so she quietens down, but that doesn't stop the excitement in her voice. "Let's go get random food samples! And then, the most chaotic stuff we can! Oh, oh, and maybe after that, we can go to a thrift store!"

"No, no," Aoyama butts in, "let's go to a cosmetics store first! If they give out any free samples, I need them!"

"Then if there's a restaurant with free samples near a cosmetics store, we can get both, right, kero?" Tsuyu asks.

The stylish blond pauses, a blank expression on his face, before nodding in agreement. "I didn't think of that, mademoiselle," he says, smiling at her. "Thank you." Tsuyu smiles back, her index finger lightly poking her cheek.

"Then it's settled!" Ashido claps her hands. "Go, go, go!"

Hagakure runs off like it's a fucking competition, dragging Tommy and Uraraka with her by their hands, the latter yelping in alarm. Aoyama and Tsuyu are close behind. In no time, they're already browsing through store panels, looking specifically for free samples.

Tommy grins boyishly, joining the search near Tsuyu, thankfully one of the more calmer ones of their impromptu group. This is gonna take forever, with how much fervor the others have.

Uraraka finds a stand with small, delicious baked pastries, another with some produce, and one giving out free sodas, somehow. Tommy immediately nabs all the different-flavored Coca-Colas and

chocolate or jam-related pastries he can, shoving them in his inventory in two incomplete stacks. Even though he can't eat them all at once, he still ignores the protests from others to have some. Prime-damn-it, he already has like a trillion bags of their shit in his inventory! It's *his* inventory, so he's allowing himself to have a few dozen pastries and drinks, alright?

He does give a couple muffins to Uraraka, though, for pointing the first and third stands out to him.

Aoyama gets some free skincare products, as well as something for his hair and some make-up. Hagakure finds the weirdest, most chaotic fucking shirts and jackets ever, and Tommy ends up keeping at least three of her finds. Oh, and there's also some cool fucking pants that are also useful combat-wise, so he keeps those, too.

All in all, it's like a successful raid. Thank Prime Ashido chose a giant-ass mall; there were practically unlimited resources.

When they meet up at the rendezvous point of McDonalds, Yaoyorozu and Jirou greet them normally, entering a jovial conversation with Tsuyu, Uraraka, and Aoyama. Ashido, however, immediately runs up to Tommy and Hagakure.

"Guys," she whispers frantically, a grin on her lips. "I left for the bathroom while they were in a conversation and they didn't even notice I left because they were just *that deep*. And Jirou was playing with her ear jacks like she was fiddling with her fingers and blushing the entire time!"

Hagakure feels like she'd be smirking. "So," she begins, just as quiet, "do we still wait, Tommy?"

Tommy sighs. When'd he become the impromptu leader of... whatever this hell is? "Depends on if Yaoyorozu shows feelings, too. And what do you mean by 'we'?"

"Oh, she *totally* does," Ashido gushes, stars practically beaming in her eyes as she ignores Tommy's question. "She looked so happy whenever Jirou talked! You don't even know how she stared at Jirou too! They were just so—" The pink-haired girl grabs her shirt over where her heart would be, clutching it tightly and making a weird expression. "They were *adorable*, I tell you!"

Tommy resists the urge to sigh again. He feels like Aizawa in situations like these. Maybe that's why the man needed a teacher assistant. "Still," he says, "you should wait. Love takes time and shit. If it becomes painful to watch them at some point because they're that obvious, then go for it—unless one of them's said to you they want their own pace when courting the other, or whatever. Then, you mind their boundaries and wait."

"...Wow," Hagakure mumbles. "You really know a lot about this, huh?"

"S hard not to, when you live with someone like Wil while Sally still visited," Tommy says offhandedly, immediately shutting his trap because *what the fuck*, that's too much.

Of course Ashido and Hagakure pay more attention to that, the nosy teenagers they are. "Who?" The pink-haired girl asks.

"*No one*," Tommy snaps back, trying to reel in the sudden defensive anger in him. He moves away from them, gaining his own space back. The air grows uncomfortable, the lighthearted atmosphere gone. "Just—forget I said anything after my spiel, alright?"

Ashido frowns. It feels like Hagakure would be, too. They nod and let him be, though.

...Prime, what made him say that? Was it the casual camaraderie? The comfortable atmosphere? Maybe he's becoming soft in this world, or for this class? Tommy usually has more control over himself, though.

Maybe... maybe these outings remind him of what he had befo—

Tommy stops that thought right there before it can even grow to fruition. He's already grown past that. Phil and Techno leaving them behind was something he'd accepted, long before Wilbur could tell him it was alright and nothing was wrong even though his eyes said everything.

He's gotten past that.

He *should've* gotten past that.

...One thing's for sure: Tommy's growing too attached to everyone here, enough to let a secret like that out.

But—he can't even help that! This chaos is exactly what he's used to, enough to feel nostalgic or sentimental or whatever the fuck. It's enough for this class and this world and all of its residents to grow on him. And—Tommy won't cut everyone off like that! He won't, he *can't*, because not only would it hurt, but...

But Dream—he, even in prison, was still scared. He had to be.

Tommy has attachments, and that's his strength. Dream was alone, and that was his weakness. Dream was scared of the power Tommy's attachments hold. He has to hold on to that strength.

(It hadn't helped him in the end, had it? Being here, ~~being dead~~, only proves that.

Tommy shoves that away with fervor and a fierce "shut the fuck up.")

Yet... he can't just be blurting out shit like that...

Tommy sighs tiredly, looking up. He'll just—have to watch his words, from now on.

...If that'll even help.

Yaoyorozu called a fucking limousine for them to ride. A—a fucking *limousine*. With its own driver and everything.

"What the fuck," Tommy softly whispers. The others, save Yaoyorozu, seem to be in the same state of shock he's in, judging from the silence of the area. Prime, even most of the other pedestrians and shit have stopped to just—*stare*. "Yaoyorozu, what the *fuck*."

"Ah?" Yaoyorozu, who had been walking to the limo like everything was in order, looks at him. She frowns, not unkindly. "Have I not told you to call me Momo? Yaoyorozu must be a mouthful... Um, assuming I haven't, please call me Momo from now on! I don't mind." Then, she adds on, "So... what's the matter?"

"The—this!" Tommy exclaims, gesturing towards the fucking limousine. "Not that it's bad, but... overkill, much?"

Yao—Momo blushes a little, smiling bashfully. "Think of it as a 'thank you' for letting me come with you all, okay?" She says.

"But Y—sorry—*Momo*, the arcade money, and then paying for all of the *clothes*, and now *this*—"

"Once again, think of it as a 'thank you.' My parents wouldn't let me use a car less, um... normal than this for today, anyway."

Normal?! This is *normal*?! What the fuck—

Tsuyu, the clear-headed person she is, is the one to accept reality first. She moves to open a door, but pauses when the chauffeur does so for her. "Thank you, kero," she says with a slight bow, the chauffeur doing the same, before getting in.

Following her is Aoyama, who's gotten his flamboyant facade back up. He slips into the car like he fucking owns it, though not arrogantly. More so gracefully.

That starts a domino chain for the rest of them. Uraraka's the last one to get in, and only did so after some beckoning from the other girls and Aoyama. Even then, she'd sat like her very presence diminished the worth of the limo by millions.

And then, the ride starts as if this was completely normal, filled with mindless chatter.

After a few minutes, Tommy opens his inventory, fingers hovering over the mass amount of bags in it. All of them had their own bags, and he'd tried to organize them into groups at the mall to make it easier, but he can't exactly remember which is which anymore.

Well. Fuck it, the others'll sort through it anyway.

So, he starts pulling them all out. In his peripherals, it seems like Aoyama can immediately tell who's bag is who, somehow, because he's the one passing them out. The ones that are Tommy's are left behind; the others are given to their respective owners.

As he takes the last bag out—oh, it's the one with the plushies in it—Tommy slumps in relief. Prime, he feels so much lighter. He doesn't want to put the shit that belongs to him in his inventory. "I'm never doing that again."

Ashido grins at him. "Thank you!" She sing-songs, though she does sound genuinely grateful. Her words only causes the others to say their thank-yous to him as well, just as thankful. Which—okay, he wasn't that prepared for them to be honestly appreciative, so he only huffs and turns away, looking out the window.

...Wait. Isn't this the path to Tari's?

"Oh!" Aoyama exclaims, similarly looking out the window. "Monsieur, don't worry; this is entirely on-plan! We went to the mall not to just enjoy ourselves, but to help mademoiselle Evergreen with some installments, too."

Tommy tilts his head. "What installments? When did you—"

"Ah," Jirou interrupts, faux-calm, "we asked her early in the morning. And don't worry, the installments aren't anything too major."

...A lie.

Tommy narrows his eye just as the car stops. His gut isn't telling him that something's inherently wrong, but he does feel tense in anticipation. For what?

"Can I come?" He asks.

"With the seven of us, we already provide plenty of help," Tsuyu says. "You wouldn't have anything to do."

"If these are small installments, why does Tari need all seven of you?"

Uraraka pipes in, this time. "They're small installments, but there's a lot of them, y'know?"

Tommy frowns. They're all truly against him coming.

...His gut isn't saying anything bad is going to happen still.

"Once again, don't worry," Momo says with finality, grabbing her bags. She unlocks the door on her side, getting out of the limo, though she pops her head inside to add, "It'll just be a moment!"

Tommy purses his lips as they all start collecting their luggage, too. His instincts still aren't blaring.

...Okay. Okay then, he'll just. Stay here. (He trusts them, even though they could be setting him up. Isn't that a scary thought?)

He starts counting the minutes.

One.

His eye keeps darting around to the windows.

Two.

Tommy strains his ears; he can't hear anything besides the sounds of late evening.

Three.

He starts biting his fingernails.

Four.

The walls start closing in. He looks at the car door, finding the button that rolls down the window, and breathes in the fresh evening air.

Five—

The door opens.

Tommy looks at the person that enters, relaxed but ready to fight—

Oh. It's just Uraraka.

"Hey!" She awkwardly begins. In a normal environment, her voice would be quiet; in the silent evening, it's a bit loud. "Um. We finished putting in everything. Wanna come in and rest a bit before we all, y'know. Head home?"

Tommy nods, hastily getting out the car and relaxing when he's able to fucking stand. The claustrophobia drains out of him like rain falling in a storm sewer.

Though, turning around makes his maybe-paranoia-induced suspicion pile higher. "...Uraraka, the lights are off."

"Tari decided the best time to help would be after-hours," the brunette explains quickly. Too quickly.

Tommy doesn't move for a moment. He stares at Uraraka's face, even as the brunette visibly becomes more anxious.

Not a lie.

"...Alright," Tommy decides, entering the limo to put his shit back in his inventory. Once he does, he stands up again, walking to the cafe's door. Uraraka's footsteps follow close.

Suddenly, she rushes ahead, grabbing the door handle before he can. The brunette smiles apologetically before opening the door, grabbing Tommy's hand (after he didn't shy away), and entering the dark cafe.

Tommy frowns, squinting in the dark. Literally nothing's fucking on. "Uraraka, what—"

The cafe comes into color one light at a time.

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" A chorus of voices shout.

Tommy tenses at the light, then more at the noise, and it takes him a moment to truly process what the *fuck's* going on.

Decorations hover in the air, colorful balloons and "HAPPY BIRTHDAY" banners hanging by strings. The entire place has been renovated for this one fucking moment, and Tommy isn't too sure how to feel about that.

People, so many people, surround a larger table made by smaller ones pushed together, most likely. A patterned table cloth is draped over it, large enough to cover most of the table, and on top is... food. Lots of it. Tommy doesn't really know the terminology for a lot of it, but there's definitely some of his favorites: warm curry, a type of jam-filled pastry that Tommy had often eaten while he'd worked at Tari's, some of Inko's home-cooked meals... There's just. So much.

There's no cake. No presents, either.

Tommy looks at the crowd. There's most of Class 1-A—maybe even all of them—along with Toshinori, Aizawa, Yamada, Kayama, Nedzu, and the U.A. staff. There's Tari, there's Inko, there's the regulars of the cafe. Even *Bakugo's* here—of his own violation, too.

They're all here.

For—for this birthday party. *His* birthday party. That they made.

"...Um," Izuku speaks up in the silence. Maybe Tommy's been quiet for too long. "We heard about your birthday passing a week or so ago from an... a-anonymous source, so we, um. Most of us wanted to do something, even if it was late! Because the age of majority is eighteen for most foreigners, and it's probably supposed to be an important day, but y-you'd brushed it off like it was nothing.

"Most of us weren't going to let that be," Tari adds. She quickly amends with, "Will *never* let that be ever again. And this year would be the perfect one to start that, no?"

"A lot of us participated in the cooking!" Hagakure exclaims near the front. The birthday party guests. Oh, Prime, the *birthday party* guests. "Some of it may not be good because I'm gonna be honest with you, chief: half of us didn't know how—" That startles a laugh out of him. "—*but!* It's made with love, and nothing's *too* burnt, so that's gotta mean something!"

...Ah, Tommy distantly realizes. From the beginning, since he stepped into this world, there was no way he wouldn't be attached to these people anyway, wasn't there?

"Oh God," Uraraka mumbles, wide-eyed and staring at his face. "Did we do too much?"

Why would she say that? Tommy opens his mouth to ask, but finds that his throat feels clogged, and no words come to mind. He shuts it in surprise, only to finally feel something drip down his cheeks, and—oh.

Oh, oh, oh.

Tommy feels a tear slip off his chin, hitting the mahogany-colored wood flooring. He looks at it dazedly.

"I—What—" He laughs, a little hysterical. His shaking hands move to wipe his tears away. "This can't be real, is it? You have to be shitting me."

...Do you not like this? Koda asks, already shying away in shame.

What.

What.

Not like this?

Not like it?!

Tommy laughs, loud and boisterous and surely startling a lot of people there. The tears still flow freely from his eyes, and he can't stop them, even when he uses his palms to messily wipe them away. "How—I—How can you think I *won't* fucking like this?!" He exclaims, voice wobbling. No, no, keep it together. "This is amazing. This is so fucking *poggers*. This is great, spectacular, outstanding, fantastic—all of those words, and then *more!* Befitting for a big man like me, y'know?"

Keep it together, Tommy, keep it together.

He takes a deep, shuddering breath, wiping his eyes one last time while forcibly holding back tears. It doesn't stop a few chuckles passing through, though. "Yeah! This is the—the biggest fuckin' party ever, of course I'm gonna like it! After all, you all are the first in—y'know, *years* to recognize the glory of my birth—" Oh Prime, that's too much, *fuck*, that's too *much*—but once he's said it he can't—*stop—crying*—"and—a-and my general brilliance even if it's late, and—I just—"

"Oh, darling," Inko murmurs, already rushing up to give him a hug, and Prime-damn-it that is the thing that fucking *wrecks* him over.

Tommy curls into her small stature, silent sobs wracking his body in thundering trembles. His hands rest on her back, but even in his emotional state, he makes sure to not dig his fingers in like he wants to.

Distantly, someone shouts an enthusiastic "GROUP HUG!" Then, another warm body presses into his side, and another on his left, arms wrapping around both him and Inko, and the people keep coming until Tommy feels entirely surrounded by warmth, joy, and maybe even something like love.

He laughs again, lighter than he's felt in years.

Yes, Tommy's latched onto these people now. They're his home. And he'll fight tooth and fucking *claw* for them.

"So," Tommy starts, after the party's over and everyone's almost done cleaning up, "mind telling me who was the 'anonymous source?'" Yeah, Izuku said "anonymous source" for a reason, but fuck it, he was curious.

Koda meekly draws attention to himself. Clementine basically ranted about what you had said about your nightmare to me because she herself couldn't do anything besides be there. And I just... really wanted to do something... because of how turning eighteen is usually a turning-point for a lot of foreigners, like Mi-do-ri-ya said, he confesses, apologetic. Sorry. No one else knows, if that helps. I only told everyone that your eighteenth birthday passed, as well as what your birthday was.

Tommy just stares at them in bewilderment before he sighs. He's never talking about anything in front of Clementine again.

Chapter End Notes

1. arcades prolly don't close that early (the time in this scene is like 6pm). HOWEVER, tommy doesn't know this since he's never been to an arcade until now; thus, he falls for ashido's lie easily [\[return to text\]](#)

the zalgo text during the dream sequence is basically tommy's mind trying to deny any inconsistencies that can't be brushed off that easily. after all, tommy's longed for this familiar camaraderie again for so, so long, even if it's been shoved down and only reappears in a dream.

he wanted this, before. he's always wanted this, even when phil and techno had left wilbur, tommy, and tubbo in the dust, and they had to survive on their own. even when it was just him and tubbo against the world. even when l'manburg was crashing down, even in exile—especially

in exile, really, especially with ghostbur that just wasn't the same. he's just gotten really good at suppressing it—until now.

because now? tommy's being reminded of what having non-dysfunctional friends and family-figures is like, with class 1-a, izuku, koda, aizawa, inko, tari... people who, y'know, actually know what communication is, are (for some) mostly open with their feelings, and don't bottle shit up like the dream smp. and now, all of this longing is slamming into him like a prime-damned truck.

tommy's still in the past a lot, when it comes to friendships. but... the bnha world has just started teaching him that some things will never be the way they were, even if they recover. tommy won't have that same birthday party he had when he was twelve and phil and techno were still around. wilbur won't be as happy—no one will be. there's still tensions between tommy and tubbo, really, as unbelievable as that seems.

the bnha world will make birthdays have a new meaning to him besides painful reminders of what was. it'll also teach him that maybe, he has to move on.

he can move on. it just takes time.

thank you for coming to my tedtalk wahjgahgdaj,,,,, and ty for reading this far !!!!

limelight.

Chapter Summary

sports festival! sports festival! sports festi

Chapter Notes

HEY IM ALIVE !!!!!!!!!!! hello :D

sorry for the long wait, everyone!

i did not explicitly write the cavalry battle because 1. i fear it'd just be izuku's experience with minor changes and 2. i., am not smart enough to make major changes w the cavalry battle,,,,, i feel like i'd just put the anime into words—*previous versions of this are exactly that*. istg i've tried writing the cavalry battle, and i couldn't, and having this inability to do so tanked my motivation and is one of the main reasons why this took forever,,,,,

sorry for not writing the cavalry battle and that the next chapters are gonna be divided weirdly and, once again, i'm sorry that this took way too long. please enjoy !!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Cavalry battle was fucking *intense*. Tommy kept up with everything the teams did, of course, and he didn't lose track at all. Nope! No way. Big Man Tommy Innit absolutely knows what every team did. It's just that Izuku's team had the ten-million points, Todoroki's team was solid, and Bakugo's team worked surprisingly well, which is why he knows how they did more than the other teams.

For being the bearer of ten million points, Izuku handled the pressure better than he thought. Not that Tommy thought he might have a break down, but he'd probably at least feel some panic. Despite being under that weight, though, Izuku used all the abilities that his teammates could provide in an efficient way. Especially—uh... Hatsume's toolbox! The little mini-shields she packed were great for blocking Kaminari's voltage, and the rocket elytra's an easy way to maneuver aerially.

(And also real fucking cool. He's getting one from Hatsume no matter *what*.)

Speaking of the mechanic, everyone on his team did well to work together, too! Uraraka lightening their weight, Hatsume and her gear, and Tokoyami and Dark Shadow's defense and offense... Sure, there were a few mishaps, and Izuku was still fucking *reckless* with playing with OFA, but they still (kind of) won!

And then, under Monoma's taunting—because of *course* Tommy would remember the person who's taunted *Bakugo* (besides himself and anyone in class) and made it both funny *and* out alive—Bakugo seemed a lot calmer than Tommy expected. Sure, the bastard immediately threatened to kill him first

before going after everyone else, but at least he *warned* people first. He communicated something to his teammates so that they could prepare, and that's honestly a miracle in itself.

Mini-Aizawa's team... they were clever, to use the cover of the surrounding chaos to sneak past everyone while snatching their points. Tommy doesn't think the other used his Quirk to do anything, considering that the brief glances he saw of that team on the TV screens hanging above the audience, they kinda acted as a team. It makes Mini-Aizawa and the other unknown person on his team's Quirks a mystery, still, but...

Moving on. About Todoroki's team, there isn't much Tommy can say besides that it was perfect in most, if not all, aspects. He... tried not to look at them much while also paying immense attention, but it was hard when they'd forced themselves against Izuku's team and got the spotlight. But Tommy got through anyway (with shaking hands and flashes of brown hair, cracked horns, and a suit replacing Todoroki's flickering across his eyes.)

...Well. Tommy gets up from his seat, body practically vibrating with the need to move. Since there's a break until the next round, he should go get some stadium snacks.

"Where's Izuku at?" Tommy says outside the Sports Festival stadium, muffled by the chicken in his mouth. He practically juggles the other snacks in his hands: cotton candy in these little boxes, a few sodas (that aren't Coca-Cola, but whatever), a shit ton of other yakitori sticks... it's a bit of a struggle to shove them in his inventory. But, they're hella cheap for food—probably. He isn't too sure if a few hundred yen is expensive for this shit. It's not like U.A.'s poor, anyway, so Tommy just *had* to get these.

Uraraka, from where she stands with her back turned to him, yelps in alarm. She puts a hand to her chest as a shaky sigh tumbles from her lips. As an apology, Tommy offers her a yakitori stick. "I was wondering that, too," she mumbles, hesitantly plucking the food from his hand and chewing on it thoughtfully. "Thanks for this, Tommy. You have the best timing."

"Fuck yeah I do," Tommy beams, already offering another stick to Iida, who takes it stiffly.

"Thank you," he says, looking kinda bothered—or amazed—by how Tommy's eating. Currently, Tommy's stuffing another yakitori stick down his mouth, having already eaten the first one. "Do you not know where he is either?"

Tommy swallows all the chicken, rolling the leftover sticks of his snacks between his fingers. "Nah," he replies, inventorying said sticks. He glances at Kaminari, who's... not really available for conversation. Probably wouldn't be able to eat, either, and these things are *really* good... but despite his greed, Tommy still offers a yakitori stick to him. "'S why I came here. Was gonna give him some food, too."

Fortunately, Kaminari still gives him a thumbs-up with both hands, not moving to take the food. Tommy grins, stashing away that yakitori stick with it's other dozen-or-so duplicates for him to eat later. He turns back to Uraraka and Iida and, as a partial afterthought, adds, "Nice job, by the way! All of you fucking kicked ass!"

Immediately, Uraraka blushes, laughing as a flustered response. Iida, on the other hand, takes the praise in stride, smiling at him. However, he's still kind of a killjoy, so of course the first thing he says after Tommy so-graciously compliments him is: "Language!"

Tommy jokingly huffs. "Oh, what are you, an old man?" He absolutely can't hear whatever Iida protests after that, resolutely blocking out his voice by calling out to Hagakure and offering some soda.

As he heads back to the main building of U.A. with the other students, passing out free snacks on their way to the cafeteria, Tommy purses his lips. Izuku will be fine—he wouldn't be far from the stadium, there's several heroes around, and Izuku has OFA. His gut feeling isn't becoming worse or anything when he thinks about him, anyhow.

Izuku's fine. He has to be.

And Tommy's right. Izuku shows up to the cafeteria not long after everyone else has filed in, wading through the crowds of students to meet up with his classmates. He brightens when he sees Tommy, who grins back and offers him a stadium snack. As Izuku takes it, Tommy comments, "The move with your Quirk was so damn *ballsy*—and equally fuckin' great! Just don't do that shit too much, eh?"

Izuku laughs, scratching the nape of his neck with one hand. "I know, I know," he says, and Tommy's positive he'll absolutely do something like that again. But then he glances down to the side, some distant look in his eyes, and Tommy can't help but tense because something's *wrong*.

But, well. Izuku needs to rest, not have an emotional breakdown here or something. Reluctantly, Tommy moves away, heading to Tokoyami even though Izuku's stare clouds his thoughts.

"...everyone has to wear those clothes to do a cheer battle in the afternoon," someone—Mineta, if he recalls that voice right—says in Tommy's peripheral. Tommy pauses, hand pausing from where he was handing a soda to Tokoyami to listen in further as Mineta explains that Aizawa ordered them to. Which... *what*? Wear clothes for a *cheer* battle? *Aizawa told him that*?

...No. There's no *way*. Aizawa's a practical, logical man who still *kinda* has morals, he doesn't just do anything for nothing, and there's no damn way he cares for a *cheer battle*. Tommy glances around a little, ignoring Dark Shadow's confused caw as his mind separates the chatter of the cafeteria to locate Mineta, find who he's talking to, where he's pointing, and—*oh*, fuck *no*. Not this shit again. (At least Kaminari isn't there like the first [and last] time.)

"No the fuck you *won't*," Tommy snaps, tossing the soda to Tokoyami before basically parkouring over to the grape midget, eliciting gasps from eating students as he leaps over them. He subconsciously opens his inventory, taking out a long streak of gauze by ripping it off with his teeth, before stashing the fabric roll away. His feet are feather-light, and in a matter of seconds, he's right by the table Mineta's at.

"...don't have to believe me," the perverted grape continues scamming—*Momo and Jirou?! Oh*, Prime-damn-it, "but we heard from—"

Tommy slams Mineta's mouth with the strip of gauze and a fierce smile, tilting the midget's head back with how much he's pulling the fabric so that Mineta can't talk. Fortunately, he made it long enough to where he could just tie a knot on the back and let him suffer. Unfortunately, Tommy... probably isn't allowed to do that. Actually, he most definitely isn't. It's tempting to do so anyway, but he's positive he'd be forced out of U.A.—being here in the first place is a miracle. (and he remembers what happens to those who break the rules.)

"He heard from no one," Tommy states, grinning even wider as Mineta struggles in his grasp. "Momo, Jirou, nothing like that was issued. Ignore him."

He turns back, softening his grin towards the two girls at their mildly perturbed and very grateful expressions. "You think Aizawa cares for cheer?" Tommy rhetorically asks as an explanation, already moving Mineta away from the girls. Tommy continues: "Have you seen him? He's literally decked in *black*. He pulled an expulsion joke to keep you on your feet. He hasn't slept in weeks, I bet. Mans is literally alive due to caffeine and solely that. Nothing else."

A faint blush darkens Momo's cheeks as she looks away, flustered. "W-Well," she begins, pausing. She opens her mouth, closes it, and then opens it again to say: "I... should've expected that to be a scheme of some sort, but... a-as Class Rep., I have to hear the voices of everyone and consider them, even if the person is... unpleasant. Regardless, I thank you for your assistance in clearing this misconception once more." The blush on her cheeks gets darker. She's inhaling so much copium, Tommy can practically breathe it in.

Jirou, on the other hand, is significantly less ashamed when she, in one go, says, "Oh thank *God* that was all a lie." She slumps, placing a hand on her chest with a not-quite laugh; more like a few breaths of relieved air. "I did *not* want to go out there in that. Thanks, Tommy. We owe you again."

Tommy beams a kind-of forced grin at Jirou, still holding a struggling Mineta. With a wave, he leaves to report sexual harassment not for the first time, and tries not to strangle the victim in his hold.

Tommy huffs, knocking out Mineta with a swift strike to the back of his head once they're out the cafeteria.

The entirety of the situation is weird. Not the Festival, no—Tommy's had an ample amount of time to dissect differences between the one he knows, and the one he's experiencing. Neither is the disconnect of not being from this world, because he's long gotten over it.

It's Mineta. And in a weird way, Kaminari.

Several times, Mineta's done or said something inappropriate, almost inexcusable in nature. Once or twice, he's roped someone else into it, like Kaminari, though it was only *once*. Most times, Tommy or Aizawa catch them in the act and stop them, the latter pushing Mineta to see whoever Hound Dog is like he does for the others when they're reminded of the USJ. And most times, Mineta's acts *could* be called sexual harassment.

It's just that though he's probably had marks on their records and shit, or whatever schools do, Mineta hasn't really... seen the consequences of his actions at all? Besides Tommy or Aizawa berating him (which, how has he not learned already? Tommy may be terrifying, but Aizawa's anger is *nightmare-inducing*.) And the girls seem comfortable with Kaminari even though he's been involved in some of this shit. This world is softer, but shouldn't they be even a little suspicious that Kaminari's like Mineta?

Nedzu hasn't even said much, which is odd for someone as smart as him. By now, Mineta—and maybe even Kaminari, just by proxy—should be suspended at *least*. And sure, that wouldn't look good for U.A. or this generation of to-be-heroes, but neither does the USJ incident or letting a sexual harasser into a school of students and letting that shit fester. It's kind of the same with Bakugo, in a way, just replacing the pervy-ness of Mineta with the violence of Bakugo, because from what he knows from Izuku, he *should* be expelled. Aizawa's seen what Bakugo's attitude is, too.

It's just... weird and most-likely wrong to keep people like Mineta and Bakugo here, even if they have potential as heroes.

Tommy huffs again. He stops at the same office he remembers to go to for reporting this shit over and over again, and opens the door, preparing to simply leave Mineta to the beasts like he always does—that is, the scathing lectures the pervert's probably memorized by now and the glares locked onto his form. The people there might just expel Mienta themselves; if they do, Aizawa would have more work with a replacement, especially for the Festival. [\[1\]](#)

...He *has* to talk to Aizawa and Nedzu about this soon.

The recreational games that U.A.'s set up aren't anything too special. No fighting, nothing dangerous. Thank Prime there's something simple like this for everyone—his class certainly needs it. But in the mean time, Tommy does briefly contemplate the match-ups for the one-on-one fights.

They go as follows:

Uraraka versus Hatsume, that mechanic girl on Izuku's team.

Bakugo versus Nirengeki—who's probably the other person on Mini-Aizawa's team.

Yaoyorozu—ah, *Momo* versus Sero.

Kaminari versus Tokoyami, which'll be interesting to see play out.

Izuku versus Iida.

Aoyama versus Kirishima, which Tommy knows who'll win because Aoyama's still a one-trick pony.

Ojiro versus Shinsou.

And finally, Todoroki versus Ashido. Quietly, Tommy sends her prayers, because he also knows she's not winning this one.

Mini-Aizawa and... Nirengeki? They still have mystery Quirks. Neither Mini-Aizawa or the unknown person were showcased much on the Obstacle Race, as all the focus was on the top three. In the Cavalry battle, like mentioned previously, their team was slick, so none of the cameras really captured them, either. Nothing much to go off of when it comes to theorizing about their Quirks, but Tommy tries to make do. (...Izuku's rubbing off of him too much with this theorizing shit.)

Even then it's a too-short endeavor, certainly not long enough to last him the entire length of the recreational games. Tommy resists the urge to lip-trill, slumping in his seat as he just barely focuses on said games again. Shinsou's and Nirengeki's Quirks, whatever they may be, will definitely reveal itself during the tournament, though, especially considering the match-ups.

(With that train of thought ended, Tommy can acutely feel the energy in his body that's been buzzing around since the start of this whole thing. He shifts uncomfortably, giving in to the urge to bounce his foot rapidly as paranoia seeps into his skin. Why does today still not feel safe? There's heroes around here, there's Recovery Girl and probably an entire team of medics for injuries, there's enhanced security measures... it should be safe, but it isn't, and it's fucking ticking him off.)

Should he check up on everyone who's resting in the meantime?

Oh, the fuck's he thinking—anything's better than sitting here, even if it's a wild goose chase to find everyone. He'll just get up and check, if only for a moment. So, Tommy gets up and briskly walks out the room, not-quite in-tune with what's around him as his mind dives into a narrow-minded focus.

Yet even getting good affirmations of his class' well-being—even Izuku's—does nothing to soothe his nerves. Tommy finds his teeth nibbling on his fingernails after he's made sure that Shoji and Sato are alright, unable to stop his eye from darting around every hall he finds or his body from taking feather-light steps and halting around corners. He heads up the stairs to the private viewing booth for the staff above feeling no better than before.

Tommy forces himself to stop biting on his fingernails, instead taking a takoyaki stick and a soda out. He cracks the latter open, already finishing guzzling down the fizzy flavored drink in moments. He wipes his mouth, stashes the glass bottle in his inventory, and slumps in his seat with an internal sigh and crossed arms.

His class will do fine—better than what anyone could expect. Recovery Girl is there if any of the students get majorly injured, and there's probably an entire medical team prepped if shit goes wrong. Heroes surround the stadium. They'll be fine.

It's the only paper-thin comfort Tommy has as he digs his fingers into his bandaged arms and waits.

"Audience!" Present Mic screams. Ochaco takes a shaky, nervous breath, walking up the stage. She stops at her respective side, watching Hatsume do the same. The announcer continues: "The finals that you've all been waiting for are finally starting! Match number one: she's looking nervous, but she's done well so far! From the hero course, it's Uraraka Ochaco!"

"Versus! Fully equipped with support items..." Hatsume grins, adjusting the goggles on her head. "From the support course, it's Hatsume Mei!"

"N-No harsh feelings, right?" Ochaco asks, voice barely heard over Present Mic. She internally panics at the little stutter her voice did, because, well—she's on *stage*, she can't just embarrass herself like that! Heroes are watching; her *parents* are watching! Her future's on the line here!

Hatsume slips her goggles over her eyes, still grinning. She stands with a slant, a hand on her hip while rummaging through her support equipment to bring out a few weird gadgets. "Nah, not at all!" She exclaims, equipping a few of them. One of them's familiar: the jetpack that Midoriya had in the Cavalry battle.

Before this, Hatsume had offered Ochaco some of her "babies." To make things even, she'd explained at Ochaco's hesitance. Hatsume had equipment when Uraraka didn't, after all—there's bound to be some sort of unbalanced power.

But, well...

"Doesn't that just make things more unfair?" Ochaco had questioned. *"I have hero training, but if you give me this, I'd also have support equipment. You just have your equipment."* She'd scratched the back of her neck, sheepishly grinning at Hatsume's confused look. *"I-I just think that I'd rather fight with what I got, y'know? Like, um... like improv! Because it, uh, won't be the same on an actual battlefield, so..."*

Yes, nothing in life was fair. Ochaco's life that consisted of mainly helping her parents out at work taught her so. And maybe she should've taken the equipment for her own benefit, to get noticed by more people by combining her capabilities with support equipment. But it just... didn't sit right.

Hatsume had simply looked at her for a long, long moment, just observing. Then, she'd let out a quiet, *"huh."* Hatsume's usual exuberant energy bounced back with ease, though, when she clapped

her back with a grin. *"If that's what you want,"* Hatsume had said, relenting.

When the match basically turns into an advertisement for Hatsume, Ochaco feels a teensy bit of regret for not getting the equipment; after all, she'd have at least helped the other a little more with her career if she did, and Ochaco still would've won. But it's small compared to the simple, tiny pride she feels, being able to show what she's capable of while against someone with more support. ^[2]

"Now that the break is over, let's get onto the second match!" Present Mic shouts into the mic, his voice reverberating across the stadium. Katsuki's scowl deepens as he stalks across the green field, heading up to the battle stage. He stops at his respective side, almost tuning that loud-ass announcer as he continues: "He was kind of famous in middle school! This isn't the face of a regular person! From the hero course, it's Bakugo Katsuki!"

"Versus!" A small pause fills the air with a sense of disconnect and hesitation. "...Sorry," Present Mic says, "he hasn't done anything to stand out yet, but he's the one I'm rooting for! Also from the hero course, it's Shoda Nirengeki!"

The first thing Katsuki thinks when he looks at his opponent is: Shoda Nirengeki looks fucking weak. But from what he's seen in some other students, Katsuki can't exactly underestimate people like he'd done in Aldera, because they were all fucking weak in middle school. (And from what he sees in front of him, with the extra's wide eyes and slanted eyebrows that remind him so eerily of weak, useless, meek *Deku*, Katsuki has to keep his guard up and play dirty.)

But regardless of what the extra looks like or what his Quirk could be, Katsuki gets to the point even when Banana Head stops talking but the crowd's still roaring: "Hey. If you're gonna withdraw, do it now. You won't get off with just an *'ouch.'*"

The extra doesn't seem offended—really, he seems more resolute, his expression shifting into something more unwavering. "Though I do appreciate you giving me an option," he begins, "I don't plan to go out so easily."

"READY?!" Present Mic shouts. "START!" ^[3]

"Then *die*," Katsuki snarls.

Immediately, Katsuki rushes forward, already aiming to get this over with in one shot. The extra himself also runs across the field, much faster than Katsuki had anticipated. They meet with bare blows, explosions in between every few strikes or so.

At some point, Katsuki blasts the extra back, taking a few steps back to add more space between them. Gradually, they'd been inching closer to the boundary on the extra's side, and Katsuki doesn't have enough sweat on his palms for a finishing explosion. Like hell is he going out pathetically like going past that shitty barrier due to a sudden move his opponent makes.

But then, just as he's about to charge in, a quiet "Now!" rings out—

—and Katsuki freely curses as a space on his right arm feels like it's been *slammed* down. He barely staggers, but the pain hurts enough for him to glance at where the extra's Quirk—because it can't be anything else but that, because that extra is across the God damn *stage*—hit. Is that the fucking hint of a bruise?

Present Mic is commentating or some shit, but Katsuki can barely hear it over his sudden focus on his opponent. He's still standing and already in a battle stance, the sleeves of his clothes slightly singed. There's barely any time to figure out what the fuck happened when Katsuki has to deflect more bare attacks, this time firing an explosion much more quickly and charged than before.

And then it happens again as his opponent is across the damn field, his sleeves even more burnt. The extra says "Now," and all of a sudden, Katsuki's wrist bursts in pain.

The blond grits his teeth, other hand itching to clasp his wrist. He aims a deadly glare at the extra, the other still determined and unfaltering. Right, new plan: blast this extra into *smithereens* immediately, because there's something up with his fucking hits.

Katsuki moves to do exactly that, propelling himself forward with explosions. He plays the offensive, merciless in the way that he doesn't give the extra much time to react. His opponent handles it surprisingly well, meeting his fists and explosions with swift, solid defenses. It's irritating—it's fucking *infuriating*.

The extra's been trying to rotate around while they're fighting, huh? Because they're both so close to the boundary line, and if that extra could activate his Quirk while Katsuki's back is to the line, he's thinking it could be it for Katsuki—he could make the blond falter, could push him out so fucking simply. Katsuki blasts himself back as soon as he thinks he's too close, making sure the heat gets into that extra's face.

That bastard still activates his Quirk anyway, a distinct wave of pain landing near his inner elbow. There's a pattern to it, one too-easily discernible: Katsuki's right arm, his wrist, his elbow... the extra's trying to disable him.

Except when Katsuki takes a moment to focus, he finds that the pain at his elbow is... lesser. Not significantly so, but enough to be just-barely noticeable with a sharp sense. Katsuki's eyes narrow at that, and he looks at Old Hair to assess him again. He's sweating, he still looks fucking *annoying*, but there's also a hint of panic that passes through his eyes when they make eye-contact, so fast it could've been unreal.

Oh? Does he think Katsuki's found something out?

Right arm, one of his wrists, and his elbow. Mysterious pain on each impact site caused by his Quirk that's lessened. Katsuki's pretty sure that Old Hair hit him in those places, too, and in that order from oldest to latest.

...Oh. Katsuki can barely hide a feral smile.

Old Hair's Quirk is weakening with each use. Katsuki doesn't have to know how it fucking works; he just has to know that victory is *inevitable*.

With new vigor, Katsuki launches forward, no hesitation in the way he makes blast after blast in Old Hair's face. By the time he backs off, Old Hair has plenty of ash and minor burns speckled on his skin, as well as bits of the dirt and dust from the cement underneath them. The more this shit goes on, the more powerful Katsuki's explosions get. At this point, Katsuki will win.

But Old Hair, like his word, isn't going down easy. His fists, constantly clenched due to blocking and attacking Katsuki, loosen up a little. The blond tenses, observing what's in his opponent's grip: shards of the stage, it looks like.

Old Hair wastes no time in tossing one in the air. Katsuki blasts forward, prepared to destroy whatever plan he has, when he whispers: "Now—!"

And then that shard of concrete *flies* towards Katsuki. He can barely slow his propulsion enough to where he wouldn't fuck his balance up by throwing his head to the side, just barely missing his cheek. Fuck, he can feel that shit cut a few strands of his *hair*.

Katsuki feels a bloodthirsty, adrenaline-filled grin burst on his face. Old Hair's already tossing another (actually, a handful) into the air, aiming one just right to where it zooms towards the blond again. Clearly, it's supposed to hit his face, but Katsuki blasts forward, already dodging the shard that almost grazes his ear.

This shit must be to stall in some way, or a worst-case scenario measure. A pretty shitty one because Old Hair can only do one at a time and the speed of his concrete shards seems to be slowing. Katsuki dodges the rest of the barrage with ease, never once straying on his path to Old Hair even though his arm, wrist, and elbow still pulse with a dull pain.

Eventually, Katsuki ends up aiming a fully-charged explosion right in front of Old Hair. And with a smile, he lets it loose, blasting his opponent past the boundary line and off the stage.

For a long, long moment, the stadium is silent. Katsuki shoves his hands into his pockets, staring at Old Hair once the smoke clears. His hair's pretty singed and ash-filled, the front of his clothes blackened. He's still conscious, eyes half-lidded and looking up at Katsuki.

"Good game," the idiot decides to say with the last of his energy, before promptly passing out right then and there.

With that simple statement, Midnight declares Katsuki the winner, and the crowd goes wild.

Chapter End Notes

1. i have not-quite redemption plans for mineta, but nothing that excuses his actions n stuff. he's just gonna go through a lot of internal shit, because like almost everyone's not really done that and i want a challenge of giving a 2d character Complexity (somewhat). if you don't like him getting even a smidge of redemption and wanna see him get fuckin pummeled by everyone, this isn't quite it. sorry for those who want mineta-bashing! there's prolly entire fics for that, so!!!
[\[return to text\]](#)

2. im not an engineer/mechanic of any sort, nor am i creative enough for it; thus, no detailed funny match 😞 [\[return to text\]](#)

3. so like, this entire fight is prolly ooc and very canon divergent because i,, havent watched the full anime ,, so ion wanna be spoiled,,,,, which means that idrk how shoda acts, nor what he says/does to activate his quirk or how it exactly works

(the wiki is so vague imo because can he just activate w/ any imapct he makes? like if shoda hits someone twice, could he choose to activate the first, or is it always the latest impact ??? can he only activate his quirk where skin-touch was, or if he uses the head of a hammer, would he be able to use his quirk where the blunt part is????? and what are his drawbacks ??? hello ?????)

for the purpose of this fic, 've made some shit up

so uh ,,,,,, yeah, heavy canon divergence w how this shit works, sorry [\[return to text\]](#)

edited sept. 30, 22:57/10:57PM EST to add a detail where aizawa is pushing his students to go to hound dog

edited again mar. 7, 21:33/9:33PM EST to change "takoyaki" to "yakitori" since takoyaki's actually squid,,,, ty Ultaer for pointing it out :]]]

fighter.

Chapter Notes

warning: illogical/uncreative stuff alert!!! my creativity died on me for these fights lol

EDIT 2:10AM EST 10/17/22: AGHHHHHHH IMAGINE FORGETTING AN ENTIRE FIGHT. UM,,,,,,,,, SO LIKE. TODOROKI V. ASHIDO'S UP NOW AHAHA

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Everybody!" The announcer roars, "Are you ready for the third match?!" Equally as deafening, the crowd screams back, excitement buzzing in the air.

Momo silently sighs as she walks into the battlefield, already feeling the mass amount of stares on her. The sounds, the stares—none of it is helping her stay calm.

It'd felt like only seconds had passed since the beginning of the Festival, and she can't help but feel like she should've spent the time during and between the one-on-one battles more efficiently. Momo had spent most of that time planning her attacks and how to defeat Sero, ever since the match-ups were announced, but she should've... done more, or something. Ensured that her plan would work.

Oh, worrying over it is useless now. Momo steps onto the stage along with her opponent on the other side, feeling the heat of the ignited flame geysers next to her as they flare. She takes a calming breath, looking up to meet Sero's eyes (mostly) fearlessly and tuning out Present Mic's commentary. He does the same but with a lot more nervousness, giving her a grin as he raises an elbow.

"Good luck?" She offers over the roar of the crowd.

"Yeah," Sero nods. "You too."

"Start!" Present Mic shouts, and then Sero immediately starts launching his tape directly towards her.

Momo dodges the first few with mild difficulty, trying to inch closer to the middle of the platform to be far away from the boundary line. She still gets caught by a streak of tape, its end plastering itself on the sleeve of her shirt. Sero makes a noise in triumph, reeling his elbow back, and if Momo hadn't been expecting it and dug her heels into the ground, she'd have fallen.

With a moment of hesitation, Momo creates a sharp switch-blade (she can't be sure that knives are allowed) and slices through the tense, stretched tape latched to her arm. She leaves the remainder that's stuck on her skin alone. There's no time to worry about the little details, only that she keeps moving forward.

Sero doesn't look too shocked, though. There's a plan he has, and maybe the way he's shooting his tape is a part of it? Momo can't think about it for too long, though, when a shot of tape almost grazes her sleeve. Oh God—can he change the properties of his tape to make it more adhesive? Can he make it double-sided? Is it naturally double-sided? The variables she knows about Sero's Quirk are too little and reliant on surface-level observations to help her here.^[1]

As Sero keeps shooting tape, Momo's eyes quickly dart around the platform. She doesn't have time to do a full-scale analysis, nor does she have any opportunity to, but there's a few things she does notice: there are parts of the floor lined with tape, *maybe* the result of the trajectory of Sero's tape in order to hit Momo. So with a quick prayer in hopes that this improv-idea and probable-risk works, she ducks down and creates three wide rectangular shields as a barrier directly on a few lines of tape, peek-holes near the top of the barricade.

The problem with this is that Momo's been rendered stationary, too, her feet stuck on Sero's tape, making this match more on the side of a waiting game. Her original plan was almost the direct opposite of that: creating a polearm and slamming into Sero as fast as she could, knocking him out of bounds. The long-range game they're playing, though, would make her polearm useless—Sero would probably be able to take it away from her anyway by latching onto the weapon like he did her forearm.

Nervously, Momo extends and retracts the metal of her switchblade again and again. Sero seems to have covered a majority of the central platform in tape, confirming that it's double-sided (because why else would he do that if not to limit her area of movement?), before aiming for her shields. Sero might've made the adhesive stronger, which serves to her benefit and demise; her shields will hold strong because they're stuck to the ground, but one mighty tug from Sero if his tape's latched on, and it'll all fall down. Momo doesn't have *time* to plan; she has to think.

As Sero begins tugging on her barricade, Momo takes a quick moment to create some acetone from her fingers and let it pool around her feet. It should take five minutes at best for the adhesive around her to wear off. Though it might be useless because the mass amount of tape along the platform will still make her trapped, at least it's some form of mobility.

Okay, so—how does she deal with this? There's tape on the platform. Momo can create acetone to remove the adhesive, but it takes time that she can't afford. Sero's still on the other side of the platform, far out of her reach, and—

—huh? Wait...

Oh. Momo feels so, so foolish; if Sero's on the other side of the platform stiff, he isn't immune to his own tape. If he is, then his *clothes* most certainly aren't. If she could just...

She wastes no more time, creating a small grappling hook with only a couple sharp hooks and setting her finger on the trigger. Her middle shield's starting to fall, so she manages to shimmy over to one on her side, setting the tip of her grappling hook at the edge of the peephole it has. (The adhesive may be wearing off; Momo only had to twist her feet a few times to create friction for her to move them.) After a moment of hesitation (if the hook injures Sero, would she be reprimanded?), she pulls the trigger.

The hook whizzes through the air, latching onto Sero's shirt. He yelps in surprise, tape barrage momentarily subsiding as he glances down at the metal object digging into the fabric of his clothes with its barbs. And that moment when he's off-guard is all Momo needs.

Momo reverses the move he did on her in the beginning of the round, *reeling* the grappling hook back. Sero digs his heels into the concrete flooring, taping his shoes to the ground with quick-thinking. But the way he's frantically trying to yank the metal hook out instead of taking his shirt off (*no*, Momo is *not* a pervert, it's just a logical thing to do) or even tugging the grappling hook on his end tells her that he's panicking.

She creates another grappling hook and shoots that for more security, seeing it land on his collar. And with a grunt, Momo takes a step back and *pulls*.

The extra force is what she needed. Though his feet are still in his shoes, the rest of Sero's body hovers over his own area of tape, still being pulled and therefore held by Momo's grappling hooks. It feels like a Herculean task to keep her hands from letting the grappling hooks slip out, but she manages, continuing to tug and tug and tug and—

Sero falls. His shoes rip out of his tape, or maybe his feet slip out, but regardless, he tumbles down face-flat onto the tape-less concrete around him, soon pulled into the sticky area of his own making. Continuing to panic, he puts his hands on the floor, presumably to lift himself up, only to realize his mistake when his hands get stuck on it, too.

Midnight recognizes his defeat immediately, waiting a few seconds to make sure he truly can't get out. "Sero is incapacitated!" She soon shouts, the crack of her whip signalling the end of the match as it rings throughout the stadium. Soon after, the shouts of the crowds do, too.

Momo hesitantly knocks the middle part of her barrier down, stepping on it to get a little closer to Sero. There's still quite a distance between them, so she creates a large blanket to cover the entire ground, flapping it in the air once to use it fully. Once it lands on the tape-covered ground, just barely covering Sero's head (ah, she's gotta work on measurements), Momo walks on it, soon looming over Sero.

She crouches down. "Um, so. Does the adhesive ever wear off, or do you need—"

"—Yeah, I need help," Sero interrupts, muffled by the way his face is facing the ground. "My tape's adhesive can last for *weeks* depending on its strength, which *then* is based on my mood and more stuff."^[1]

Momo winces, already creating diluted isopropyl from her palms and letting it pool around the closest of his hands. She then shifts to the piece of tape still on her arm, smattering it with isopropyl, too. Should be weaker than acetone, but she can't use it in large amounts, either. "Ah," she says, ignoring the way Midnight coos something about sportsmanship, over-exaggerating about Momo literally just helping someone out. "Sorry."

"Don't be! You just did what you needed to do to win." Over the still-roaring crowds and Midnight calling a hero to help, he adds, "That was cool, by the way! The whole grappling hook thing. Didn't even know you could make that."

Momo cracks a smile. "Start moving your fingers on this hand bit by bit," she instructs. "Also, that's honestly not the most intricate thing I've made."

"Really?! Then what is?" Sero's enthusiasm makes her pause, her smile faltering.

Eventually, with her smile a little brighter, she says, "Well..."

Momo begins to detail the times she's created machines of all sorts—even an attempt at recreating the Antikythera mechanism^[2] out of pure curiosity—while helping Sero break free from his tape prison. Though she does ramble during some stories, derailing the entire thing because Sero *has* to know about some mechanism or theory or thing, her smile stays the entire time.

Fumikage feels unbearably seen as he steps up to his place across the field, the light shining down on his form along with the all-seeing cameras that record his every move like sharp needles scraping along his skin. The crowds are an annoying cacophony, one that grates in his mind incessantly, and Present Mic is no help. Once again he is reminded of how comforting the darkness of the night is, because though it is the unknown, at least it is *familiar*, a danger that he is used to.

Dark Shadow stirs worriedly in his consciousness, another welcoming comfort.

You alright, Fumi?

...The discomfort is manageable, Fumikage decides, eyes tracking his opponent. Regardless, it is insignificant in the face of this fight—especially with someone like Kaminari. Their introductions should be finished in just a moment's time, and thus—

Yep, yep—I'm already on it!

Dark Shadow, always in sync with Fumikage, starts to form as soon as Present Mic begins the match. It manifests in wisps of smoke and shadows, solidifying its form in compacted layers of darkness. As it forms, Dark Shadow curls around Fumikage like a snake, its illuminating gold eyes piercing even in the daylight.

They waste no time—with what Kaminari could do to them, they cannot afford to. Fumikage runs forward, feet pounding against the concrete platform. Dark Shadow reaches farther, distributing the density of its form to protect Fumikage while also giving strength to its upper half. In no time, they can take a swipe at Kaminari, and if they can do so, if they can have the advantage swiftly—

"Let's go," Kaminari shouts, aiming his hands at the ground, "one-point-three million volts!"

Reckless.

Both Dark Shadow and Fumikage reel back, but not in surprise. They have had to expect anything they could, considering the rampant, bright nature of lightning. Like planned, Dark Shadow coils around Fumikage like a cocoon, swaddling him in its embrace. Though this will still damage it, this is better than taking the risk to knock Kaminari out of bounds that will destabilize Dark Shadow even further and render Fumikage paralyzed. Fumikage instinctively raises his arms over his face, slamming his eyes shut.

There is a moment wherein the only sound that can be heard is crackling lightning running unrestrained over the field, a harbinger of chaos and destruction if they were in the foray. It dies down quickly, the air stinging with the remnants of Kaminari's sheer power. Fumikage lowers his arms slowly, his senses humming in displeasure at the unusual sharp air.

Dark Shadow's form does not seem to be too affected, still marginally wisps at its edges. Fumikage sets a gentle hand along it just to be sure, satisfied when his hand doesn't sink through or feel the buzz of lingering static.

When Dark Shadow speaks again, there is a seeping amusement permeating its tone.

All's good on my end! It's basically safe, but—

A sound like a badly-muffled caw rings out. Fumikage's confusion rises higher, because that is most certainly a laugh.

—Fumi, I told you that you worried too much!

When even more confusion fills his mind, that just makes Dark Shadow struggle to not laugh harder. It quickly unwraps Fumikage out of its coils, letting him adjust to the light of the day before revealing...

Ah.

You see?

Kaminari is entirely unable to fight. His mind seems to be fried, like what Fumikage had noticed after the Cavalry Battle as their class headed towards the cafeteria for sustenance. Dark Shadow fails to hold back more snickers as the two of them approach Kaminari's incapacitated form, Fumikage more wearily than Dark Shadow.

Gently, Fumikage pushes Kaminari in a way that the blond steps outside of the boundary line. The audience is silent, disappointed at an anti-climactic battle, but a few do start clapping when Midnight declares the winner of the match to be Fumikage.

Fumikage sighs quietly. He reaches out, shaking Kaminari's shoulder in hopes of getting him out of this stupor to no avail. With hazed eyes, thumbs up on both hands, and a silly smile, all Kaminari manages to do is say, "Whey."

You think he needs to go to the clinic, or can we take him to the class viewing booth?

That would be ill-advised, Fumikage believes, to whisk Kaminari straight to the booth. The only reason they were unscathed was because Dark Shadow was covering them; on the other hand, Kaminari had no such protection. In the face of his own power, he himself had overestimated the limits to his mortal form.

Alright. ...Should I carry him or something? Kaminari looks like he's about to collapse.

Yes, that would be ideal. With a drawback such as this, handling it with delicacy is essential.

Dark Shadow slips out of Fumikage's form once more, hesitating as to where its claws should go. It then decides to simply grasp Kaminari's collar, hoisting him up with ease. Without preamble, Fumikage starts walking away with Dark Shadow and Kaminari in tow, relishing in the shade that the entrance to the field provides as they leave the spotlight behind.

Tenya stands on his side of the battlefield, resolute in the face of all the attention on him. The taste of orange juice lingers on his tongue, his body filled with energy. Despite Midoriya looking equally as brave, Tenya's learnt some of his nervous ticks over their time at U.A.; such as the way Midoriya's eyes keep flitting around, how his shoulders are tense, and the way his fingers twitch.

It's inspiring, the way Midoriya keeps his brave face on when he smiles at him. "Good luck," he mouths. Tenya nods.

And as soon as Present Mic calls the start, Tenya bursts forward in a flash of movement, engines revving up. It's not his top speed, not yet, so he makes a risk and spends time running near the edges of the boundary of the platform. The only thing he has over Midoriya when he uses his Quirk is speed, after all, and even that may be by a hair.

Midoriya, far too used to tracking blurred figures and things, is easily able to watch him even through the dust-clouds Tenya's kicking up. (At the thought of a curtain concealing his moves, Tenya takes to

skidding more at random intervals, making sure to be subtle.) He's standing still instead of warily trying to follow Tenya's every position by spinning around, having moved to the center of the platform to simply observe. When Tenya feels his engines burn with a familiar warmth and ache, he knows he can't wait any longer.

Bursting through the smokescreen he's created, Tenya reels his leg back, aiming for a hard kick to Midoriya's upper body—

—and gets *blasted* back by an equal, if not stronger force.

The disruption of his balance is startling but adaptable, his raised foot automatically using the explosion of power to stabilize his body by sliding behind him. His smokescreen's been pierced through, a clear circle where there was once dust. Tenya's been forced back, the bottom of his shoes making visible dark marks in the concrete flooring. He takes a glance behind him; he's close to the boundary line, his foot just a few feet away.

He looks forward again. Midoriya stands with a hand raised, a single finger glowing with the rivulets of the power his Quirk holds. It fades relatively quickly, and though Tenya can see some minuscule discoloration where the illuminated power once was, Midoriya is unaffected.

Tenya ducks back under the security of his curtain, only taking another lap around to kick more dust up before going in, this time aiming for Midoriya's legs—

Another knock-back. Dust swarms his face, getting on his glasses, and Tenya can only brush it off momentarily with his fingers.

He tries again and again, hyping his speed up further and aiming for different places. Every single attempt at a hit is blocked swiftly, and he is kept near the boundary line.^[3]

Tenya shifts wearily.

This may not be a battle of power or speed—both Tenya and Midoriya have that, the latter having significantly more limitations on his strength, making them almost equally matched. This may just be a fight of stamina, of outlasting the other. Yet Midoriya has ten fingers and his legs, and Tenya only has just that: his legs.

He will lose, and Midoriya will rise.

The thought is disheartening. Tenya doesn't linger on it (*—can't* linger on it, even though it feeds into the parasite that lives in his mind that always chants about *legacy, legacy, legacy.*) He charges his engines up, and—

In a sudden change of plan, Tenya tries to lay lower. The way the platform shatters under them is the only reason why.

Cracks *rip* through the stone, carving out uneven, elevated platforms, leaving jagged edges, and letting fumes of dust rise. Tenya stands on a part that wasn't as affected yet still unstable, one of his feet higher than the other. The only reason he was able to keep himself stabilized and able to predict *any* of this was the widening of Midoriya's eyes and the way his offhand started to shine.

Midoriya himself stands in the center of it all, the area around him weathered terribly and indented slightly. He looks up at Tenya with a smile that screams triumph—not for the match, but for himself. Tenya feels a sense of confusion as he looks around, and—

—oh. Oh.

Tenya is not used to running on uneven terrain. Midoriya, on the other hand, having ricocheted along walls and platforms (or even trees and rocks) a thousand times before, is far too used to it. Midoriya has stolen the one tool Tenya can use, and the thing he's given in this trade is a height advantage. That won't help when Midoriya can just blast him out of the air and make him collapse onto jagged, *sharp* terrain.

Tenya purses his lips. He has to go all in anyways. (Legacy, legacy, legacy.)

So without prompt, Tenya dives down, forced to divide his focus on the land underneath him and the opponent in front. He manages to shoot off of a piece of debris, raising his leg to kick Midoriya's side, only to *swerve* from his momentum as Midoriya shoots off onto another piece of debris, balancing atop of it with ease. Disoriented, Tenya staggers for a moment, foot landing weirdly on a shifted bit of concrete before he charges right back to Midoriya again.

Like he's done for the entirety of this match, Tenya tries again and again. And yet, he can't ever seem to hit Midoriya nor predict where he'll go next—or even how he will, in a lot of cases. Sometimes Midoriya uses his fingers to charge his Quirk and blast off, other times his legs. The only thing he can see is that Midoriya's trying to lead him near the boundary line, presumably to knock him outside of it, but Tenya hovers close to the middle as a result.

With a huff, Tenya tries something out of pure desperation to get a hit in: he takes a page from Uraraka's book during the Hero Practice near the first few weeks of school. Kicking a pile of debris up, Tenya aims for Midoriya's general direction and charges his leg across, bringing up a gale of wind possibly enough to send the debris Midoriya's way.

It might be the point where Midoriya decides to stop playing defense, as the debris is slammed back towards Tenya, a fierce gust of wind blowing it all back towards him. He bites down some sound of panic, dodging to the side as the concrete hail crashes down where Tenya once was. He stands on shaky grounds, the stone cracked and unstable while his engines release smoke, and as he looks around—

Midoriya comes in swiftly, his arm reeled back and his fist clenched tight in Tenya's peripheral vision. Tenya flinches back, already preparing to dodge, but—

—a sound of sputtering rings in his ears, and with a sinking despair, Tenya realizes that his engines are out of commission. (Legacy, legacy, legacy.)

Tenya shuts his eyes, preparing for a blow—and it most certainly hits, striking him right in the cheek. Before his body can even collapse, however, the burst of sheer *wind* that comes from the punch is like a tempest, shoving him back even farther.

Tenya skids back, stifling a sound of pain as his back grates against roughened stone, shards of concrete scraping his skin while his engines clatter loudly. Gritting his teeth, he gets up through the pain, and—

"Out!" Midnight calls. "Iida Tenya has passed the boundary line!"

...Ah. Tenya glances down. Indeed, his upper body's beyond it.

(Legacy, legacy, legacy.)

When Midoriya pops up worriedly, rushing over to him, Tenya gives him a strained smile before passing out.

Izuku waits patiently on the side of Iida's clinic bed, fidgeting with the few room-temperature juice bottles in his hands (they should be his favorite brand; Iida drinks these the most, he's noticed) while Iida rests up from Recovery Girl's Quirk sapping more of his energy. She doesn't really mind him here so long as he "doesn't cause a ruckus," and Izuku knows how to be quiet. Which is kinda why he's here unsupervised as Recovery Girl... does what nurses do? It's something outside the clinic. Maybe she's getting medical supplies or helping other students.

The nurse-hero had also wanted to look at his hands and legs, mentioning faint lines of darkened skin she saw during the match. "I just want to make sure you aren't overexerting yourself like you did during the Entrance Exam," she'd said as she gave him the okay. Izuku had flustered at that, entirely embarrassed she still remembered that—he still feels his cheeks heat up a little at the faint reminder.

Fortunately, he doesn't have to ponder on it long, as Iida's eyes groggily open up from sleep. Izuku immediately reaches for his folded glasses—clean and not cracked—that rests on his side of the bed, handing it to the other. He also sets an orange juice bottle into Iida's hands once he's set his glasses onto his face, finally able to see.

"U-Um," Izuku begins, "I didn't hit you too hard, did I...? I-I mean, of course I didn't, otherwise you wouldn't be awake, but, um. The fall looked like it hurt! And I know Recovery Girl's healed you and all, I just wanted to make sure if you're fine, and you probably are, but sorry anyway! And—oh, do you need more rest? I'm sorry, I'll just—"

Iida puts a hand in his face. Izuku shuts up.

"It's alright," the other says while lowering his hand. His other holds the juice bottle, and it seems like Iida takes a moment to process what he's holding before unscrewing the cap and taking a sip or two. "It was a battle. And I ended up fine, right?"

"...Right," Izuku agrees, hands latched onto the couple orange juice bottles in his hands. It might just be him, but Iida sounds... less enthusiastic than normal. More passive-aggressive. And because Izuku has a big chattering mouth, of course he instinctively asks, "Um, is everything—are you alright?"

Iida's expression turns stony. Or maybe even stonier. Whatever it is, Izuku knows he's messed up, so he immediately tacks on, "Y-You don't have to answer! Uh—I was just curious! And I just—I've messed this all up, haven't I? I can leave if you want—no, you probably do—I'll just leave these here and—"

"It's—fine." Iida manages, sounding like it's totally not fine. Regardless, Izuku sits back down from where he'd been trying to get up, now back to fidgeting with the bottles in his hands. The silence that follows is terribly awkward, especially with how... stoic? Passively angry? Frustrated? Iida's face looks like a mix of the three, and Izuku should've most *definitely* left anyway.

Eventually, Iida takes another sip of orange juice, sighing afterwards. His frustration seems to bleed out of his face when he looks at Izuku, now tinged with slight regret. "Apologies for my... bad mood," he says. "It's not aimed at you, I promise."

Izuku feels his tension slip away, replaced by slight uncertainty and worry. "If it isn't at m-me, then who are you mad at?" He asks softly.

Iida clenches the orange juice bottle. Loosens his grip. Clenches it again. On his face, his eyebrows are furrowed; contemplative.

"...self," Izuku hears, his voice quiet even among the silence of Recovery Girls' clinic. He's smart to piece together the first part of the word.

And the first thing Izuku has to question is: "Why?"

Izuku feels genuine bewilderment rise in him as he continues. "You did good with what you were given! You attacked and moved based on your skills, aiming for places where I'd become vulnerable. I'm positive that if I hadn't broken the ground and put that in my favor, you would've outlasted me; after all, you've been running all of your life. You have so much more stamina than me, but the weird terrain forced you to use more than you probably would've liked! And the whole wind-kick thing that went all *WHOOSH*—I think Uraraka did something like that? Anyway, I was *almost* unprepared! If I were someone else, I think you'd be the winner."

By the time Izuku realizes he's ranting, voice having risen a little, Iida's smiling at him softly. "Thank you for your kind words," he genuinely expresses, though that doesn't ease the fierce, embarrassed flush that takes over Izuku's face. "I... I think I knew that during the match. As in, I utilized all I could. However..." Iida sighs again, silently this time. "My family's entire line is made up of heroes. You, of all people, know that."

Izuku flushes at the light jab to his hobbies but nods anyway. With the reassurance that he's listening, Iida resumes. "Though it is great to be able to take pride in it, it's also... quite a burden. One that I'm aware of and entirely ready to take on, of course, but. Sometimes..." He tightens his hold on the orange juice bottle in his hand. Releases it. There's a sad little smile on his face. "With fights like ours, sometimes I feel that burden, and... I feel like I could've done more to show that the Iida family is still—strong, in a sense. That I'm a part of it."

Izuku hums quietly and solemnly, staring at Iida's orange juice bottle as he listens. "It's something that isn't significant, though," Iida dismisses, and Izuku is going to *scream* a thousand reasons why it is, swear to *God*. "Just a little worry I have. Sorry for letting you carry a part of my burden too."

"Don't be!" Izuku protests, setting his head atop the caps of the bottles still in his lap. He huffs, looking up at Iida with determination. "I think that you've done a fine job already! Sure, you didn't win, but you made the best of your situation! Isn't that a good thing, in the end? 'Lose in the best way possible to show potential?'"

"And yeah, there's people like Bakugo and Todoroki who have all the potential in the world, who already could be pro-heroes with more training, but you have to remember that in the end, all of us are just first-years at U.A." Izuku goes on. "They have as much experience as being heroes as the rest of the class does. And yeah, we survived the USJ, and you may want to show that in some way by being ultra-powerful or something, but the mere fact you did says a lot already! You don't have to show that you're the peak of the Iida family or something!"

At the end of his ramble, Izuku huffs, taking his chin off of the top of the bottle caps and leaning back. He's unrelenting when he makes eye-contact with Iida because this is one of the few topics that Izuku will never budge on. "A-And don't ever say your problems are small," he demands, a sudden anxiety making itself known in him because of his rambling. "Small things build up to larger problems if you don't handle them right. It's like what happened with the Lighthouse Hero: Aurora—they kept dismissing their declining physical and m-mental health from their Quirk until they collapsed during a rescue mission and had to recover."

Iida stays silent when Izuku ends there, face surprised and open. After a long moment wherein Izuku resists fidgeting, Iida breaks out into a genuine smile, eyes curving up into crescents. "Thank you," he says.

Maybe he can't fit everything he feels into words. Maybe everything he wants to say is in them. Regardless, Izuku beams right back.

"C-Can I, um. Stay here?" He asks. "To keep you company. Unless you don't want any!"

"That's fine," Iida decides after taking another drink of his orange juice. "But wouldn't you want to observe everyone else's Quirks?"

Izuku holds no hesitation. "I would," he concedes, looking back at his friend, "but I think you'd be lonely."

Iida smiles again. For a moment, they stay silent, until he asks, "Could you tell me who Aurora was, then? I've never heard of them."

Izuku perks up. "Oh, yes! Aurora's a hero from Europe, essential in rescue missions due to their Quirk, Illumination. Basically, they can summon light regardless of where they are, and they've grown to be able to choose the properties of the light, like its temperature, brightness, color... things like that. But the toll it took was that it sapped their energy, messed with their consciousness with hallucinations—like tricks of light—and, well, other things they didn't wanna disclose. If overworked..."

With a beaming, toothy smile, Eijirou bounds up to the platform, cracking his knuckles excitedly. Aoyama on the other side looks confident and sparkly like he always is, one of his hands on his hips, but there's something a little off about it. Grin slipping for just a moment, Eijirou prepares to call out and ask what's up—

"And START!" Present Mic shouts.

Only hesitating for a moment, Eijirou rushes forward. Unlike him, Aoyama wastes no time shooting a laser that whizzes by him in a beam of light, just barely grazing his side. He looks back for just a moment, watching it fall apart with ease, before continuing to rush towards the blond.

Aoyama has pretty good accuracy. (Eijirou kind of wants to ask if he could teach him how to be that precise after this; he's still fumbling with his broadsword at times.) A lot of times, Eijirou's had to pause his barrage so as to not let a laser beam singe him, and it's allowed Aoyama to move away from him. It's not ideal, but it's better than testing out if Eijirou can deflect Aoyama's lasers using his Quirk on live television.

But! With each new laser, Eijirou's getting a handle on dodging them. There was even one moment where he predicted where Aoyama would shoot, perplexing the blond when he pivoted in the opposite direction after the shot was fired and kept moving. And bit by bit, Eijirou's getting closer.

And then, Aoyama falters, one of his hands hovering over his gut.

Eijirou takes the opportunity with a grin and the tiniest hint of regret for abusing Aoyama's sudden weakness. He pushes himself forwards, clenching his fist and reeling it back. He feels it solidify, skin, bone, and muscle turning jagged and tough just like it always has when he activates his Quirk.

Without hesitation, he *rams* it into Aoyama's gut, feeling shining glass where a buckle would've been shatter under his Quirk. The shards are mildly blinding if he were to glance down, but Eijirou doesn't, keeping his eyes ahead even when Aoyama looks at his belt with what could be fear.

Instead, he uses his offhand to shove Aoyama by the shoulders—and just outside of the boundary, where the blond loses his balance and falls down.

Midnight calls the winner; Eijirou doesn't really pay attention to her. Avoiding the shards of glass on the ground, he walks around it, approaching Aoyama who's still staring at his belt. "Sorry for breaking your belt, dude," he sheepishly says, un-hardening his hand and scratching the back of his head. "You alright? You were, uh, holding your gut and all..."

"...C'est bon,"^[4] Aoyama soon responds, unclasping his belt with a silent sigh. He winces as the support gear falls, but doesn't move. "I'm alright. Just a drawback. The glass, it didn't hurt you, non?"

"It didn't, don't worry bro!"

Aoyama gives him a smile, though it lacks its usual confidence. "I knew you'd win," he says with a specific tone that makes Eijirou pause with its familiarity. (Self-depreciation.)

He doesn't hesitate. Eijirou looks back at him with a sharp, toothy grin, offering his hand. "Still," he comments, "fighting even when you know you can't win is manly as hell!"

Aoyama looks up at him and his hand, an unusually weary and bewildered look filtering across his face. It settles onto something oddly grateful and happy, a softer grin compared to his usual ones on Aoyama's face as he reaches up and clasps Eijirou's hand.

"Oui," he says softly, getting up with his assistance. Even then, Aoyama still keeps his hand clasped on Eijirou's. "I guess it is."

("What chivalry!" Midnight exclaims, and immediately, Aoyama lets go. He's still smiling, though, so Eijirou considers that a win.)

Hitoshi walks up to the platform, eyes ahead and locked on his opponent. Ojiro had introduced himself with a smile during the Cavalry Battle. "Sure," he'd easily said when Hitoshi had approached him, asking him to team up. "I'm assuming you have a game plan?"

He did. It wasn't the best, and it required excellent coordination to pull off considering that stealth played a major role, but the chaos during the entire thing proved to be a viable cover. Even still, their team almost got caught once or twice because they'd just met, able to work together but not fluidly.

And now he's here. Just a few battles more, and the staff would have no choice but to recognize him as a potential hero.

"Cause if you're just as corrupt as the villains you despise, manipulating your words to cause shit, then what does that make you?"

Hitoshi grits his teeth, resisting the urge to slam his hand against his temple. Those damn *words* have been looping over and over again in his head ever since that one-eyed blond (if rumors were true, Tommy was his name) said them. They're the entire reason why he hadn't used his Quirk on others during the Cavalry battle, simply stealing the points of others during the chaos with... shaky

cooperation, but cooperation nonetheless. It went mildly well (it was enough to get him here, at least) but it won't work for him now.

...Well. Hitoshi adjusts his collar, staring at his past associate with sharp, narrowed eyes as he remembers one of the lessons he's known and one that makes itself prevalent now. Heroes need to play dirty, sometimes, and Hitoshi's always had a silver tongue.

When Midnight begins the match, Hitoshi wastes no time. "Hey," he calls out before Ojiro's made a move, "you were a horrible support in the Cavalry Battle." Hook, line—

Ojiro gapes at him. Then, his brows furrow, confusion and anger scrawled all over it. "What are you —?!"

—*sinker*.

Ojiro goes practically boneless, only held up by Hitoshi's Quirk. He smirks at the sight, satisfaction curling in him. "Sorry," he non-apologetically says. "But we're supposed to disregard our morals here." At least, according to Present Mic. "Go and walk outside the boundary line."

And Ojiro does, the crowd silent all the while.

Mina is competitive. She likes being against others, likes testing her abilities, her limits. But, well—against Todoroki, of all people, she's tempted to simply forfeit. That's understandable, right?

Ahh... that wouldn't really look well for the rest of the class, if she just gave up. Especially for her, since heroes are probably looking for bravery and stuff. It's not fair, either! Everyone's trying their best, and here she was, contemplating defeat!

...Then again, what can she do against someone like Todoroki? Just... try and dissolve the ice he'll make? He makes an exponential amount of it, while Mina can only make some of her acid at a time.

She purses her lips. Ah, if she just lets Todoroki encapsule her in ice or something, then she'll only get cold and won't be seen as cowardly. That's probably the best outcome for her here...

When Midnight calls the "match" to begin, however, it's more like an end to one that never even started. Mina hasn't even taken a step before ice races across the ground, ramping up around her and trapping her legs. Acid flows from the bottom of her calves, trying to melt away the ice, but it just stacks around her.

Soon enough, Mina is caged. She smiles hopelessly even in the crowd's stunned silence, giving Todoroki the best grin she can as he walks over. "Knew it," she calls out. "I give. Gave it my all earlier, anyway."

Todoroki nods, stopping right in front of her. His face is stoic, as always. "Use your acid to melt the inside," he orders with no demand, "and... I'll use my—*fire*. For the outside."

"Alright!"

In the silence that follows the aftermath of Todoroki's and Ashido's match, the sudden *BANG!* that rings throughout the viewing booth is entirely too loud and shocking. Mostly everyone tenses, Tenya not excluded, looking at the door to find Tommy. He looks a little haggard but heavily stressed, eye darting around wildly and glancing over all of them at least once.

Finally, he sighs, slumping at the doorway. "You... you're all okay, right?" Tommy wearily questions.

"The fuck's up with you?" Bakugo questions bluntly.

Tenya raises his voice to cover the brusque demand. "Besides Todoroki and Ashido, who were on the field and are probably heading here now," he says, "all of us are here. Is something going on?"

"No—wait—yes, but not right now? I-I don't know, just..." Tommy is confidence and unwavering resolution personified. The fact that he's stumbling over his words, which are already ominous enough, is enough to raise panic. "Just fucking... Be careful. Yeah. That's—that's it. I'm... I'm going to stay here with you all."

Without elaboration, he scans the area again, finding an empty seat that isn't Todoroki's or Ashido's and plopping himself onto it. The class watches him wearily, seeing his still-tense form and the subconscious stimming his body resorts to, before reluctantly turning their gazes back onto the battlefield. Tenya takes a few moments longer to stare, feeling some sort of anxiety in himself stir just from watching and hastily looking away when Tommy shifts his gaze to him.

At some point, Tenya's phone rings aloud, loud and clear, the only thing that breaks the sudden solemnity of the air. He excuses himself swiftly, taking his phone out as he walks into the hall. He shuts the door behind him softly, moving a little further away.

He looks at the caller. It's—his mother. Not too unexpected. She must want to comment on his previous battle, but... why so late?

Tenya answers the call—

—and what she says shatters his world.

Chapter End Notes

1. took more creative liberties here!! idk if sero can make his tape adhesive on both sides or not n stuff, or if he could strengthen said adhesive, or how long that adhesive lasts, 'n' ,,,, yeah! sorry for making it like mineta's quirk wahshasj,,,, [\[return to text\]](#)

2. the antikythera mechanism is basically considered the oldest analog computer in the world, used in ancient greece to calculate n display info about astrological phenomena—i think. it's vvv complicated and highly accurate for ancient greek times, and even now [\[return to text\]](#)

3. why hasn't izu just blasted iida off the platform? to keep his quirk usage to a minimum so that he doesn't break smth. sure, in this fic he's acclimated himself to abt like. 5-10% of ofa, but that's still 5-10% of ofa. it's not like he's automatically immune to its consequences—just more resistant to them. the izu in this fic is far more weary than the one in canon

he's also measuring iida's speed—iida had, after all, revealed one of, if not the top speeds he can get to during the cavalry battle. it's something izu can barely match, let alone watch, and so he's just waiting, because if he keeps using 5-10% of ofa but iida can just keep dodging, then,,,, that's not good for him (also, iida's engines? prolly hard asf. mans doesn't wanna break his arm another way by being reckless.)

basically, izu's just being cautious. very, very cautious and overly defensive. until he came up w/ the idea of breaking the platform, but even after that he's still Hesitant abt doin anythin else as big as that until iida's engines broke. sorry if the entire match seems stretched out n seems weird, or if i'm overestimating the power of ofa[\[return to text\]](#)

4. translation: it's good/fine. i am using a translator though, so uh,,,[\[return to text\]](#)

wretched dystopia.

Chapter Summary

hahA angst time as i try to wrap the sports festival arc in one chapter with a neat lil bow and fail spectacularly

Chapter Notes

HEY!!! REALLY QUICK, **CHECK BEFORE THE ENDING IIDA CALL OF LAST CHAPTER—I FORGOT TO ADD A FIGHT** AND I AM SO,,,,,,, MAD AT MYSELF,,,,,,, SORRY (it's todoroki v. ashido,,,,, it aint much BUT STILL HOW DID I FORGET,,,,,,, ITS IN MY N O T E S)

anyway enjoy this,,,,,, monstrosity of a chapter. sorry the end's rushed; i've been working on this in all the free time i have and because i do monthly updates usually, my mind is Fried (i've written like 20k total this month mannn aghhhhh,,,,, im not used to that,tttt,,,,,,)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

From the second Shoda Nirengeki had shown his last attacks to the moment he was knocked out, Ochako knew that she's maybe, kind of, *probably* screwed. She might've not ever had a chance in the first place considering that her opponent if Shoda lost—and he had—would soon be Bakugo. And, well... Bakugo, of all people, wouldn't want to lose *now*.

But it's still terrifying, this sudden hopelessness that dawns on her. (How can she even be a hero—how could a hero choose *her*—if she can't even improvise off of this?)

She... well. Ochako can't exactly come up with a plan against Bakugo. She wouldn't have the energy to match Bakugo's strength or stamina, so she can't outlast him. And if she used her Quirk on him, that'd just give him an aerial advantage, right? After all, Bakugo could just propel himself with his explosions, and Ochako would be stuck on the ground. With the plan she originally had, to slam down debris like Shoda did...

It *could've* worked, but that wouldn't look good to the heroes—or anyone, really—as they would just call her a copycat or something and won't look at her. Also, he's already probably thought of a defense mechanism against an attack like Shoda's for someone else with a similar Quirk or move...

Ochako sighs miserably in the small break room, opening her eyes that had closed as she simply thought. If Iida were here, he'd tell her to not worry or something, to think logically. He's gone due to some emergency, though, which she can respect. And Midoriya would tell her a plan, maybe. He'd ramble about Bakugo's weaknesses to her, but he's still with the rest of the class, respecting her decision to think alone about this stuff.

A moment later, she scoots her chair back, internally wincing at the screech of its legs against the floor. She takes a breath, looks up at the ceiling for a second, and then gets up in search of Shoda.

She won't change her plan. It's the best one she's got, the one with the highest chance to win—the one that'll hopefully make her goal of helping her parents out closer. She'll just... go and see if it's alright with Shoda first.

Though Ochako had to get through Monoma's antics to even talk to Shoda, she did eventually manage to do so. His approval of her inspiring an attack after him sits in her mind, comforting. She takes a breath, looking at Bakugo's red eyes from across the stage, and feels a wave of fear threaten to lock her limbs in place.

...It's fine. Recovery Girl's here, and no matter the outcome of the battle, Ochako *will* be noticed. She'll do her best here, and it'll be enough.

And then, she charges in, hoping that she and Shoda were right.

Once Ochako explains her situation as well as her original plan to him, the first thing that Shoda told her was: "I think you're worrying about this too much." Ochako blinks at him, surprise scrawled all over her face. Shoda cracks a nervous smile to her.

"Is that confusing?" He asks. "Sorry, I'm... not too good with words. But, um—you remember the original purpose of the Sports Festival, right?"

"It's..." Ochako pauses, contemplative. "It's to show our abilities, right?"

Shoda nods. "Do you know why I was fine with losing against Bakugo?"

"...Because you were..."

("...Even if you don't do well, be glad you made it here, eh? And if you know you aren't gonna do well, lose in the best possible way that shines a light of potential on you, alright?")

(Ah. That's what Ochako had forgotten. To be glad that she's even made it this far; that against all odds, she's beaten hundreds of other U.A. students and has made it to the last few rounds. She doesn't need to stand out as a potential hero, or think that she's not enough for them yet; she already is.

She's not supposed to beat everyone immediately, either. She's still a student. [A kid who survived the USJ and forgot she was one.] At this rate, she'll help her parents out soon—something that isn't a dream, but an inevitability.

And little by little, her disappointment recedes.)

Ochako's eyes widen with hope as she points at him. "You showed what you could do! It doesn't matter if you lost or won—you still showed potential, and so heroes will look at you anyway!"

"Exactly!" Shoda says, smiling at her softly. "Sure, winning the Festival would've been a great bonus, but I know I'm not capable of that." Ochako opens her mouth to protest that he was up against Bakugo, of all students, but she quiets when he continues. "It's better to go with a lower place, really, to not have so much attention placed on you by everyone, you know? That sets more expectations. By playing like this, I'll at least have the attention of some heroes, which is better than none at all.

"So, um..." Shoda pauses. "Worry more about using your Quirk to the fullest, and not about winning. ...If that makes sense."

Ochako beams at him brightly, her hands flapping in her excitement. "It does, it does!" She exclaims. "Thank you!"

Shoda smiles at her again. "No problem. ...You can build off what I did, by the way. Shows your abilities in the best way possible, right?"

"Right!"

"Thank you, Shoda!" Ochako shouts, pressing her fingertips together. As the audience around the stadium looks up, seeing the grand result of her resilience and seemingly foolish charges into Bakugo's attacks, a chorus of gasps rings aloud. She can't help but smile even as nausea whirls in her gut and head, letting the torrent of debris hail down.

And in a burst of brilliant light and heat and pure *sound* that breaks her ears and blinds her vision and encompasses her fully, Ochako knows that it didn't work.

Of course it wouldn't—Ochako knew this, she's embraced it, she's *prepared* for it—but the slight sting of failure is still there, found in the ashes of the explosion Bakugo makes to destroy all the rubble, falling around them like a heavy blanket of smoke.

Her skin is littered with bruises, dirt, and ash, one of her fingernails chipped and bleeding. Nausea swims like an ocean in a thunderstorm in her head, threatening to turn into vomit that bubbles in her throat. She can barely stand, her knees almost buckling in on themselves as she tries to crouch down to get some rubble, maybe to use it as a crutch, a weapon—*anything*.

She can't. Not without falling, that is. But oddly enough, Ochako's fine with that. With the last bits of her energy, she finds herself... *smiling*. Laughing, even, her throat low to avoid the minor burns on her throat.

"...Was fun," she manages after a weak chuckle, her voice strained as she tries to stay awake. Her ears are ringing and ringing, no doubt due to the loud burst of sound. Vision blurry, she looks around, eyes landing on a blob that's surely Bakugo's still-standing form. She gives him a grin, even if it pulls at the burns on her face and makes her want to hurl. "Did m' best, righ'?"

Because she did. She gave it her all, and she's gotten this far. She's beaten a majority of U.A. students to get here. Even if the majority of heroes gloss her over—even if the day she helps her parents is leagues farther—she'll be proud of herself, at least, for how long she stood on this stage.

Ochako doesn't hear a response to her rhetorical question if there is one, her eyes finally fluttering closed as her body collapses on the ruined platform.^[1]

(After she wakes up in Recovery Girl's infirmary, clear skin where burns, scratches, and bruises once littered, Ochako gets the OK from the hero-nurse to walk around, so long as she doesn't strain herself. She decides to go into a waiting room, and after Tommy and Izuku make sure she's alright, she calls back her dad because she'd missed his call.

They're proud of her, Ochako's parents. They're fine with her taking more time before she can help them. That kind of compassion is going to make her a great hero, her dad says.

And Ochako can't help but let all of her fears melt away into a smile as she cries.)

When they're far from Uraraka's earshot, Tommy sighs. "Think she's really alright?" He asks, voice soft.

"No," Izuku immediately responds, quiet but resolute. When Tommy looks at him, his hair shadows his eyes, his fists clenched. "She isn't. No one would be. But Uraraka—she wants to be left alone. So we have to leave."

Tommy hums, ignoring the way Izuku wipes his eyes. He glances back up—and almost bumps into the sheer fucking *hulk* that is Endeavor as they round the corner. If he remembers right, the man's like the number two hero or something. Izuku doesn't like rambling about him; at least, not positively.

Even if Izuku liked him, Tommy wouldn't have. The vibes he feels from Endeavor are so fucking *shitty*. From appearance alone, it's no surprise that he doesn't care about property damage and the lives of civilians in the way of his work. Tommy scowls at the flaming man, absolutely *loathing* how Endeavor's taller than him. Subtly, he shifts in front of Izuku, who gets his memo and stays back.

"Oh, there you are," Endeavor says, completely ignoring Tommy to look at Izuku. Tommy's scowl worsens, especially when he points and starts saying: "I watched your fight, the one against the Iida's other legacy. You have a wonderful Quirk, what with it so much wind pressure just by flicking your fingers. If we were talking about power alone, yours is comparable to All Might's."

Izuku's a horribly bad liar, so Tommy shifts to cover him more in case he flinched or something. "Get to the point, *fucko*," he snarls, already beginning to lead Izuku away. All the while, he never lets his eyes stray from Endeavor, practically challenging him when they make eye-contact.

Endeavor's eyes narrow in anger. Tommy smiles back, all sharp teeth and deadly threats that he can spin into promises.

The "hero" sighs, irritated. "It is my Shoto's duty to surpass All Might. His upcoming match with you will be a very instructive test bed. Don't disgrace yourself."

That hits something in Izuku. Tommy looks back to find him fucking *fuming*, his fists clenched tighter than they already were. There's an equally tight smile on his face as he looks at Endeavor, one pulling at his face so unnaturally anyone could notice he's not actually happy. "Todoroki is not *you*," he grits through his teeth, "just like *I* am not *All Might*. Is that all, *sir*?"

"...Yes," Endeavor says with scrutinizing eyes. "That is all."

Izuku's smile widens, clearly wanting to say more. There's already an infinite amount of things woven between Izuku's words that Tommy can't read, all based off of things he doesn't know. But he doesn't, instead continuing to walk down the corridor. Tommy hesitates, giving Endeavor one last disdainful glance before following his friend.

(Once they're out of earshot of that man, the first thing Izuku mumbles is: "If he weren't the number two hero—or a hero at all—I would've flamed him like you did Shinsou." A pause. "Or doused him. Knock him down a handful of steps. Whichever's best.")

Tommy breaks out into a grin. Prime, he's really become a bad influence.)

We're gonna do the same thing with Yao-Momo, right? The whole charge-in thing that we originally thought of?

Fumikage subtly nods, no more than a simple incline of his head as he walks onto the battlegrounds once more. Just like Kaminari, her creations are unpredictable. To snuff it out like a candlelight in the dark before it can drop to the wooden floor is most preferable.

Alright! Just making sure.

Dark Shadow hums a jaunty tune in their combined conscious, no doubt happier than usual. It must be from their position as a potential contestant for the finale of the Sports Festival. Fumikage finds himself agreeing; though their cooperation is unparalleled, is it fascinating that it has lifted them this far.

Oh, have a little more faith in us! Just accept that we're strong, Fumi!

Yes, yes, Fumikage long has. There is indisputable proof that resides in the remnants of USJ and of all the others they have overcome thus far. Undeniably, Dark Shadow preens at the many they have fallen, especially for those whose experience overpowers theirs.

Finally rising to the platform, Fumikage meets the eyes of Yaoyorozu who stands with a pinched smile. Dark Shadow stirs, preparing to take shape in an instant.

Just like with their previous match, when the start of the battle is called, they waste no time. Dark Shadow manifests once more in a conglomeration of shadow and void, continuing to unify the darkness until it become a hulking mass of the abyss, its talons sharpened. Without preamble and in tandem, Fumikage and Dark Shadow rush forwards, aiming for a quick match.

Yaoyorozu does not make a shield. She does not make a weapon. She creates a sort of... handle, its black steel contrasting against her pale skin as it settles in her dominant hand. From what Fumikage can see, it has a lampshade-like front, its interior white, a sheet of what could be glass covering what is inside. Fumikage's eyes widen in a realization, his feet threatening to skid to a halt because—

—No! If I can reach a little farther, I can knock it out of—!

"Close your eyes, everyone!"

—and then, an explosion of white blinds their senses.

Dark Shadow *screeches*, its cry warbling in the air. Fumikage cannot see it at all, can only feel when it moves to cover him in its darkness before hitting its limit and being forced back into him. A click rings aloud, meaning that Yaoyorozu certainly has turned the flashlight off, but as of now, it makes no difference.

Fumikage blinks rapidly to no avail, harsh monochromacy consuming all he can see. He finds that he has stumbled back, his arms in front of him, balance unsteady as he tries to regain himself. Splotches of color come and go, none of it helping when the end of a polearm slams into his chest and knocks his breath away.

Dark Shadow manifests again as pain starts pulsing throughout Fumikage's chest, though its form is visibly shrunken and thinned, its shadows dancing on the line between translucent and opaque. Futilely, it blocks a strike from Yaoyorozu's polearm, only able to push that single strike back before being hit by another.

It is all too soon that they are pushed back, Fumikage's foot slipping past the boundary line. Midnight calls the end of the match, maybe. He cannot tell, still reeling from his disorganized senses.

"Oh dear *God* I shouldn't have used an Imalent,"^[2] a familiar voice bemoans. "A hundred-thousand lumens?! Really, Momo?! *That* was what you decided was best?! I should've asked if Tokoyami himself was sensitive to light, or, or something! Oh no, oh no oh no oh *no*..." A hand sets itself on Fumikage's shoulder; involuntarily, he flinches, and the hand reels back.

Fumikage blinks some more. Soon, he can vaguely make out the form of Yaoyorozu, of whom is hovering around him worriedly. "Um, um... a-are you—no, foolish question—do you need my assistance? Anything? Is Dark Shadow alright?" Her words are spoken hastily, barely any time between words. Though Fumikage knows she means well, the noise makes his mind grate in displeasure.

Despite this, he manages. "I am... stable," Fumikage quietly decides, color once again returning to his vision. The spots haven't left, however, and so he rubs his eyes. "Dark Shadow must have taken most of the light for me. Speaking of..."

Dark Shadow?

...I-I'm. I'm alright. Tell Y-Yao-Momo that she's g-good. And that I'll b-be fine. I'll recover. And to not blame h-herself for anything. N-Nothing permanent was done!

Fumikage hums, soon relaying the report to their opponent. Yaoyorozu relaxes, but there is still a tense line to her shoulders, a strain in the smile that she gives him. "That's good," she says. "That's good."

Immediately after, she bows and blurts out, "Still, I'm so sorry! I-I should've considered the dangers of using a bright flashlight like that on people, let alone you and Dark Shadow, and—!"

"It is alright," Fumikage placates. "It was simply quick-thinking. A little... too quick, yes, but vital to heroics nonetheless."

"Right! Yeah! Should've used a duller flashlight, though..." Yaoyorozu smiles sheepishly with a dark blush on her cheeks, fiddling with the flashlight in her hands. She then freezes, promptly shoving it in her uniform's pocket before looking at it like it were something cursed. Incredulously, her flush grows worse. Yaoyorozu shoves her presumable embarrassment aside to add, "U-Um, Recovery Girl should probably check on your eyes. And Dark Shadow's condition. So... follow me?"

Fumikage nods, the last of the darkness finally leaving his eyes, leaving a sort of blurriness in its wake. Yaoyorozu takes that as an initiative to move ahead, looking back as if expecting him to follow. And follow he does, letting Dark Shadow heal in the darkness that the corridors provide.

Eijirou's not gonna lie; he's extremely nervous, going up against Midoriya. Watching him fight Iida... it was manly as hell, yeah, but also absolutely extraordinary and very humbling. As in, *miles-out-of-Eijirou's-ability* extraordinary, which also knocked a few pegs off the egos of those who were arrogant. How did either of them know what was going on? All he saw were like. *Blurs*. And the occasional moments where they stopped to breathe or something, but still.

Anyway! The point is that Eijirou is definitely not matching Midoriya in speed, of all things. Maybe not endurance either, because his body can handle pushing out enough power to shatter *concrete* and then some. Eijirou's body has always been durable, but not *that* strong. Probably never will be.

No time for any of that, not when he's on the platform! Eijirou cracks his knuckles subconsciously, shooting a friendly grin at Midoriya when he notices the sound. Midoriya manages to grin back, but it's a little awkward. Guess he's still not used to being the center of attention.

Contrary to his expression, though, Midoriya bursts forward when the battle begins. Eijirou can only be thankful that he has quick reflexes as he *barely* manages to block a strike with his forearm, his Quirk already reinforcing it. With difficulty, Eijirou throws whatever Midoriya hit him with far back, watching his opponent skid back in a low crouch.

Midoriya's in an entirely different position in moments, coming in on his right with a sharp kick aimed for his kidney. The block Eijirou does is a bit awkward, only having enough time to tuck the side of his elbow into his side and reinforce that part of him. It stings so much it feels like it burns, his arm feeling weak and limp. Eijirou winces; that was *not* a good idea.

He's given no time to recover. In rapid succession, there's suddenly a gale of wind that blasts Eijirou back, another that shoves him even further away when he's barely regained his footing. He's only able to raise his other arm up, blocking any damage to his face, and dig his heels into the ground. Something breaks on his skin, though, and when the wind dies down and he's able to look at his arm, Eijirou finds that his Quirk's been broken—not enough to be serious, but enough to *bleed*.

Before he can really do anything about that, though, Midoriya's already in his face, one of his fingers curled and charged. Eijirou can really only yelp before sheer *power* throws him to the ground, activating his Quirk across his back far too late as he violently slides across the ground. He can already feel the scrapes and bruises that'll line his back in long streaks after this.

"Kirishima Eijirou is out of bounds!" Midnight declares before he can even sit up. Eijirou decides to just lay there for a bit, exhaling a mighty breath as he stares up at the sky. The world spins a bit on its edges. (He didn't put up a good fight at all.)

The sound of footsteps rushing towards him makes Eijirou look around even though he's laying down, latching onto Midoriya's face when he looms over him. "I-I didn't hurt you too badly, did I...?" He frets, leaning over him worriedly. Eijirou takes a little longer to simply breathe before he leaps to his feet, because—

"That... was so MANLY!" Eijirou shouts gleefully, fists clenched as he beams at Midoriya's stunned face.

It takes a moment for his words to register before a large blush overtakes Midoriya's cheeks, one of his hands moving to scratch the back of his neck as a smile overtakes his lips. "R-Really, now?" He asks, a nervous laugh escaping him.

"Oh *totally*, dude!" Eijirou mimics that last flick Midoriya did because! It was so damn *cool*! "You knocked me down in like a few strikes! Yeah, you did that with Iida too—well, kind of—but that ain't the point! That was epic!"

Midoriya laughs some more. "That's—good, I guess!" Then, "You need to go to Recovery Girl or a—anything? Your Quirk *did* shatter, and your back..."

"Nah, I'm alright!" Immediately after he proclaims that, Eijirou feels his back flare with pain. He hisses through his teeth while Izuku's face contorts into panic. "...Okay, maybe I'm not. But it's nothing serious!"

"You sure?" Midoriya reaches out, hesitantly setting a hand on Eijirou's shoulder. The touch is very, very close to a wound, he realizes, because there's the barest hint of phantom pain right where Midoriya's hand is.

Something must've shown on his face because Midoriya frowns. He lets go, stepping back and gesturing for Eijirou to follow before moving away from the spotlight.

"I can walk there myself," Eijirou finds himself saying even though he still follows. He doesn't know why he says it.

"You probably can," Midoriya agrees, glancing back. "But I-I'd like to go with you anyway. If that's fine."

Eijirou blinks, stunned a little. His grin falters, but it turns brighter than before as he nods, running up to Midoriya's side and away from the spotlight.^[3]

Hitoshi is like at least ninety percent sure he won't win this battle. He's against *Todoroki*, of all people, who probably knows how to incapacitate someone in less than a second in several ways. Many would give up immediately.

Yet he still licks his lips thoughtfully, staring at Endeavor's spawn in front of him. Todoroki is impassive, his face cold like all the ice he's used. He will overpower him in moments; Hitoshi has to be quick and painful with what he says, enough to get a reaction out of Todoroki's ice mask before anything else. (He wants to win. He has to, if only to prove to *that* blond that heroes have to play dirty.)

What kind of dirt can he spew to him, to make that ice crack?

A multitude of statements and questions already line themselves up in his head. When Midnight starts the match, Hitoshi lets a shit-eating smirk settle on his face, something that always angers everyone like a taunt. He jeers, "It must be nice being Endeavor's son, huh—?"

And then he can't say another word. In an instant, ice seals Hitoshi's mouth, tendrils of it wrapping around his neck. Structures of sharpened ice point right at him from the ground and curve around his form, cradling him in a deadly embrace. He tries to part his lips, but when he feels cutting pricks of pain on his skin, he realizes that Todoroki's covered his mouth with ice cold enough that if he were to break out, his throat and mouth would rip and *bleed*.

As of Todoroki, he stands on the other side of the platform, mouth pulled back into a deep, deep scowl. His brows are furrowed, eyes shrunk into mere pinpricks. There is something wild about his gaze now, something enraged and unhinged. Something *terrifying*.

Todoroki opens his mouth. the beginning of a word coming out of it. He slams it closed in the end, remembering Hitoshi's Quirk last second and silencing the not-quite word into a quiet hiss. Any bit of hope Hitoshi had of being able to control him is snuffed out in that instant, grinded into ashes with every step Todoroki takes closer to him.

Hitoshi puts on a brave face when Todoroki is directly in his face, forcing them to make eye-contact. His stare feels like death hanging over him. "Forfeit," his opponent quietly demands, not quite an answer to Hitoshi's previous question God *damn* it, "or I will *make* you."

"Todoroki Shoto!" A female voice barks out, lined with authority. Midnight, Hitoshi recognizes. "That is *enough*! Shinsou Hitoshi is already incapacitated!"

It takes a moment, but Todoroki steps back. He still stares at Hitoshi with a brewing hatred that seeps into the way he holds himself. Eventually, Todoroki's scowl is erased, replaced with the passive, stoic line of his lips that is the paragon of neutrality. He raises a hand to the ice, hesitates, and then lights it with a gentle fire that begins to melt the ice around Hitoshi away.

"Apologies." He says. "My anger got ahold of me." Hitoshi wants to scowl. Apologies, his ass! All of that was intentional.

When he can, though, Hitoshi nods. Then, with a little more help, he's able to raise his arm and gently pry off the bits of ice around his mouth. "It's fine," he replies curtly, just as Todoroki did.

Seeing that movement, Todoroki moves back again, this time turning around and just... walking off. Hitoshi scowls, this time, glancing down at his legs that are still wrapped in ice. Must've thought that he was fine just because he could move a damn arm, or that the ice was warm enough for him to break out. Regardless, Todoroki doesn't turn back even when Midnight tells him to, so Hitoshi sighs, sucks it up, and begins to take himself out the ice bonds one agonizing bit at a time.

Katsuki stares at Ponytail once she finally steps up the fucking platform, his stance lazy and relaxed. Nitroglycerin builds in his palms from where he has them shoved in his pockets. It's fucking gross, and he can't stop moving his hands because they're so disgustingly sweaty, but he keeps them there even as he studies Ponytail.

She's nervous. Not doing a good job to hide it, either. She's shifting on her feet too much, her eyes darting around as her hand adjusts her sleeves and shit. Just looking at her makes Katsuki even more jumpy than he already is.

That extra energy won't get her far. No matter what she does, Katsuki will end her in an instant.

As soon as Midnight gives them the go-ahead, Katsuki charges his Quirk up and *blasts* across the field. The strength of the explosions propel him much faster than Ponytail thought, because when she makes a dark-gray metal shield to block him, her hold's clumsy and weak. Katsuki can't help the grin that spreads across his face as he switches from speed to heavy offense, the adrenaline of slamming explosion after explosion onto someone still so *thrilling*.

Again and again and *again*, Katsuki shoves an onslaught of pure heat and blast force on her. They're getting closer and closer to the boundary line as her footing slides back, but she isn't yielding yet. Katsuki leaps back anyway when they get a little too close to that line because he won't accept a defeat like *that*.

Ponytail must've fucked with the composition of the metal to make it explosion-proof or some shit, too, because when he stops his barrage to also see if this shit is even working, it's unscathed. She looks a little more determined as she peers at him, only revealing a little bit of her face that's visible even through the dust and small debris that falls around them.

"This is one of the metals developed on I-Island; 'dragonsteel,' they call it," Ponytail explains, as if Katsuki needs more fucking information than "explosions don't work." She starts moving forward, momentarily glancing back at the close boundary line. "Had the privilege of being able to examine its molecular composition when I got to vi—"

Katsuki is fucking *tired* of this shit. In a burst of heat and power, he flies over her, making sure to be away from the boundary line but at Ponytail's vulnerable side when he lands. Yeah, yeah, that shield is explosion-proof or whatever, but it also looks like a damn bother to carry around and Ponytail herself ain't explosion-proof.

The only thing Ponytail can do before he fires an explosion at her is widen her eyes while trying to shift her shield around and face him. Katsuki widens his palm as far as it can stretch, giving her a feral grin as he digs his feet into the ground and shifts his stance before—

The explosion he makes would've sent him fucking flying had he not been used to blast force. It certainly sends Ponytail flying—literally. Her shield is forced out of her grip and she's exposed full force to Katsuki's attack, the sound of her body skidding across the ground and to about the center of the platform loud and painful. There's a choked gasp that must be hers, a bout of coughing that follows as the dust clears. And just like last match, Katsuki stands unharmed.

Katsuki doesn't help her up. Setting his hands into his pockets once again, he simply watches her struggle to get up. In the end, she stays down, visibly flinching as her inevitable injuries scrape against her clothes and the concrete floor.

After waiting a moment longer, he sighs. "...Next time you fight," he begins, his voice low compared to its usual shout, "don't waste time on explaining shit. Your opponent needs no explanation. You shouldn't want them to discover or know weakness." He adds, "And get physically stronger. If an explosion like that knocks you off your feet, the world's gonna bury you six feet under."

Turning around, Katsuki begins to walk off, Midnight soon announcing that Ponytail's incapacitated. He heads into the tunnel or whatever that led him to the platform, his neutral expression unchanging even when he thinks about the next match.

Deku or Icy Hot against him, huh. Deku or Icy Hot.

When Todoroki finishes explaining his reality, Izuku can't speak. Something feels like it's clogging his throat, almost unable to be swallowed. The world is blurry, too, no more than splotches of color that fade into monochromatic shades of black in his vision. He raises a hand to wipe at his eyes, clearing the world only to find that the side of his hand's returned a little wet. His eyes are blurring again.

"Oh," Izuku mumbles as something warm and wet slips down his cheek. He snuffles before swallowing, yet his throat still feels lodged. "Oh."

"...Midoriya?" Todoroki hesitantly asks. Izuku looks up, finding his face. His eyes latch onto the scar. He doesn't want them to.

"Oh my God, Todoroki," Izuku eventually manages, a warble in his words. He snuffles again, wiping more tears that fall from his eyes. There is nothing he feels but horror. "Oh my God..."

When he's able to look at Todoroki again, he looks vaguely uncomfortable, a hand reached out as if he wants to set it on his shoulder or something. Izuku rubs his eyes one more time, taking a breath and finally collecting himself. "I-I'm fine," he kind of lies. "I just—it's..."

He purses his lips. "It's not pity!" Izuku blurts out. He winces, purses his lips again as he debates saying nothing else, then considers just melting into a puddle and dying, before his mouth decides on spewing whatever. "Yeah, it's. It's not pity. If that makes you more comfortable. Um. I—well, I was just..."

Izuku takes a breath. "That was like. Mourning. F-For you."

Todoroki blinks. "...For me?"

"For you," Izuku nods. His mouth decides to blabber on. "Because no one deserves that. And. And it sounds like no one else did, b-besides your mom. And I—I don't get it like you do, but I do get it somewhat. I think."

"N-None of the adults have, um. Have been kind to me, either." Izuku finds himself looking at the bandages around his arms subconsciously, his mind looking through damaged memory after damaged memory. "It's... it's been rough, at some points. Never like your life, but. Yeah. Yet I—I had my mom. Never told her about school. I don't know if she has a suspicion of what goes on. But I still have her, and if she knew, she'd mourn for me. I have friends here, too, who'd mourn for that past me. I mourned for me. And you... you had people who mourned too, back then, until you didn't."

"I don't think you've ever known what it means to be a child, either," he adds. "Friendship is an unknown thing to you. And I, I just..." Izuku glances back up only to look outside. "It's sad and ugly and warped and, and stupid. Reality. It's not fair. It never is."

"S-So if you'll let me," Izuku begins, "I... I'd like to mourn for you. Just like all my friends would. That you who got burned, that you who probably couldn't stand after Endeavor's training, whatever that entails... I'll cry for him."

Looking back at Todoroki, Izuku's probably said too much. Or that entire mourning thing was weird, because Todoroki is practically gaping for someone as stoic as him. "I..." He pauses. Hesitates. Opens his mouth again. "It is... I'm sorry, I don't understand."

That rips Izuku's heart out and shreds it. "It's okay," he says with a sheepish smile. "Now that I-I've said that, it doesn't really make sense, does it. It's fine. So, can I...?"

Todoroki slowly stops gaping. "Yes," he decides. "I'll allow you to... mourn for me."

Izuku smiles at him, silence overtaking the environment between them for just a moment. Then, his smile drops, turning into a nervous shell of itself. "U-Um," he begins, "also... You probably won't like this, but... forgoing part of your Quirk, even if out of hatred, isn't a good idea."

Immediately, Todoroki scowls. His eyes harden and narrow, whatever vulnerability that could've been in there shriveled up and dead. Izuku tenses when his stance shifts, waiting for a strike or something out of pure instinct, but Todoroki only storms outside.

"W-Wait!" Izuku calls out frantically, rushing after him. The sudden sunlight makes him sputter, his eyes getting used to it far too slowly for his taste. "I just—hear me out—!"

Todoroki, already far ahead, turns back part way only to give him a glare. Izuku freezes, unable to move out of the pure anger swirling in his eyes. By the time he recollects himself, Todoroki's looked away and continued walking, catching up to the rest of the class in the cafeteria.

Overtaking the memory in his head, Izuku frowns. He's already dwelled on it long enough; he needs to go. But it still leaves a sour taste in his mouth, lingering even as he heads outside to meet Todoroki on the field.

The battle between Izuku and Todoroki starts off just as he expected: with the latter sending a wave of ice towards him, the frost darting across the battlefield with fervor. Izuku forgoes most of the caution he had, charging twenty percent of OFA in one of his fingers (the ring finger, it seems) and shattering the barrage with ease. It leaves a clear path forward, eliminating all the ice in front of him.

On his sides are a different story as the ice continues to burst forth until it falls off the platform and spills out onto the grassy plain around them. It blocks him from moving to the side, but that's fine.

Izuku hisses, glancing down to see his finger already going through some discoloration. The pain pulses to the beat of his rapid heartbeat, strong enough to linger in the back of his mind as he focuses on what's ahead of him. Izuku hasn't charged OFA past his limits since the entrance exam, hasn't felt this pain in a while, and he'd regret it if he wasn't fighting, just like how he'd regret forcing himself to move forward if he didn't have a nagging suspicion.

Todoroki volleys another wave with the sweep of his hand after setting up a wall of ice behind him. Izuku shreds that one, too, lowering his power from twenty to twelve. It blasts most of the ice away, but not *enough*. He bumps it to fourteen.

Again and again and again and *again*, Todoroki blasts surge after *surge* of ice towards him, unrelenting and brutal like a blizzard in a tundra. Izuku uses his ring finger until it starts turning dark purple, soon switching to his other fingers until that hand can't handle anymore without him breaking it. The amount of times he's used OFA has broken the ice that had narrowed his path.

Overhead, someone comments about how this never seems to end. Izuku ignores that, switching to his other hand as he trudges on. Yet his teeth begin to chatter, his feet start slipping from every flick of his finger and every gust of wind, and his hands are minutely trembling from the cold, *God* is it cold—but he keeps moving.

Todoroki eventually wills a current of ice to flow upwards, soon running on it with ease. Izuku curses internally, craning his head up and up. He raises his index finger again, counting on it for precision. If he could just predict where he'd move—!

There!

Izuku pumps eight percent of OFA into his finger, firing where he predicts Todoroki would move. It hits the ice that makes it there, shattering the foundation and causing Izuku's opponent to fall. Todoroki takes it with grace, flipping mid-air and slamming his fist down to where Izuku is. A cluster of ice begins to form where he punched the ground.

Quick reflexes are the only thing that saves him. Izuku jumps back by only a little, instead charging OFA in his right leg to swing it up diagonally. A gale of wind follows his strike, riling up dust and fragments of concrete and ice into what could be a storm, and yet he feels no impact. Belatedly, he thinks that quick reflexes will also doom him, because he's charged *forty* percent instead of the ten that he'd planned, absolutely breaking a bone and shredding his muscles at *least*.

It *burns*. It burns like a thousand ant bites all over his leg, burns like applying rubbing alcohol on a wound except the pain is tenfold, burns like an explosion that sears his skin and makes it bleed. Izuku bites his tongue, a metallic taste filling his mouth as he does not scream. Using the momentum, he spins, barely able to regain his footing as the dust that's picked up clears.

(His hand shifts to his pocket. No golden apple slices.)

(During the kick, he realizes, his pant leg had burst apart. He glances down at it frantically. Not only is it his leg already discolored, but there's shapes of circular, roughened skin explicitly visible on him for everyone to see. There's no way anyone couldn't see them unless they were far away.

Izuku's breath hitches. His *scars*—oh God, he didn't put bandages on his legs because he thought it'd be fine, but it isn't, and—

—and with the fight right now, Izuku reasons, everyone will focus on that and not his leg. It's fine. He's fine. It's okay. *Focus.*)

Todoroki is unharmed. He's flown back, yes, farther across the field, but there's another wall of ice behind him, his hair disheveled and his clothes ruffled but in-tact. He lowers the forearm he'd raised to block the wind, using it to shove a pillar of ice away.

Izuku purses his lips, only feeling a dull feeling of surprise. From what he knows, Todoroki would not be Endeavor's son if he couldn't handle this.

"That's a lot more powerful than before," Todoroki observes after a moment's pause, frost climbing on his cheek and his right arm. He's trembling.

Izuku breathes harshly, feeling a thin puff of frost escape his mouth. His dominant hand still throbs as if he just shot another twenty percent charged attack on each finger, his other is going to its limit soon, he can barely stand on his leg that's showing a multitude of his scars, and the temperature's getting to him more every second. A feeling of frustration bubbles in him, simmering, and though everything around him could be a cause for it, it's not that at all.

It's a simple observation, something that cements itself as a fact the more he thinks about it: Todoroki is freezing, too. Yeah, he could be used to it, but at *this* rate? There's no damn way his body can maintain homeostasis if he keeps expelling frost. Either the ice is cooling him down too much, or he's too warm internally. If Todoroki doesn't stop only using one half of his Quirk, that side of his body will get hypothermia. It might already have it.

...Todoroki did say that he'd win without using the other half of his Quirk, but going so far as to not regulate his body because of pure *spite*? God, that's—

"With your leg like that, you won't be able to run. Let's get this over with," Todoroki decides, raising a hand towards him that cuts off his train of thought. Bursting forth, a flow of ice charges towards Izuku —

He knowingly charges twenty percent of OFA in his dominant hand, pushing the power of his Quirk forward with his thumb, the blast force agitating his leg as he has to shift back a little. The wind from his Quirk roars, but Todoroki's grunt of surprise sounds even louder, the skid of his shoes and the rush of ice behind him equally blaring. The shattering of Izuku's bones in his thumb, however, are the loudest, and he can't help the whimper that leaves his lips.

The dust clears. Todoroki is right at the boundary line, staring at him with bewilderment.

"Y-You..." Izuku manages through his chattering teeth, staring at Todoroki in the eyes. "Are you so narrow-minded y-you've gone *dense*?!"

Todoroki halts.

"What are you *doing*?!" Izuku shouts. "T-Todoroki, you can't—there's i-ice on your *cheek*! On your *body*! You're *freezing*! Todoroki, I tol—*thought* you'd at least use your other half to r-regulate your temperature! W-What are you—?!"

...No. No, Izuku knows what Todoroki's thinking—or really, what he's feeling. It's something that's been on Tommy's face a few times, whenever Izuku talks about Bakugo. Something that Todoroki showed during their talk. Something that Izuku's felt for himself, on occasion.

Hatred. Hatred, unbridled and unfathomable, for everything that's happened up to that point, one that makes it seem like everything is dull and dreary and awful to where it can't be redeemed.

For someone like Todoroki, where the only person who mourned his life was someone who hurt him, it's understandable. And yet—

Izuku can't think about it when Todoroki rushes towards him, aiming for a punch to his face. He charges a bit of OFA in his good leg, jumping away to the left with a cloud of dust in his wake. When he sees Todoroki's face, his mouth is tugged down into a scowl, his eyes shrunk just the slightest.

Todoroki runs again. Izuku crouches, ready to move—and falters. Todoroki... he's slower, isn't he? He's not as fast as he was in the beginning.

Izuku picks himself back up and moves away quickly, that brief moment of thought almost enough for Todoroki to get him with a jab. A brief layer of frost crusts the area of where he was going to hit, cracking on Izuku's shirt. He mentally brushes it off, taking a step forward with his injured leg to get more balance even while it hurts.

After Izuku moves, Todoroki slows to a halt, but the amount of time it takes to reorientate himself is worrying. He wavers, raises a hand as if he might hold his head, and then lowers it hesitantly. When Todoroki turns his head and finds Izuku recuperating, he staggers towards him once more.

Clenching his fist once Todoroki's closing in, Izuku charges only five percent of OFA in it, aiming it in a way that it drives into Todoroki's gut and makes him tumble back a bit. It wasn't even much, and yet Todoroki's body looks like it ragdolls. He rolls once, then twice, skidding across the concrete on his right side. Todoroki wheezes and coughs as he gets up, movements halting and slow. Even so, he raises a shaking hand, sending a wave of ice out.

Izuku doesn't have to break it because it's not like its towering predecessors. He simply dodges, shifting on his good leg. The aim isn't even as accurate, probably. It's crooked.

Their fight falls into a state of monotony like the beginning. Todoroki sends out surges of ice, and Izuku dodges. Any time the former goes in for a hit, getting slower every passing second, Izuku either shoves him back with OFA or keeps avoiding it. Izuku can feel the strain of his muscles now, the pulsing in his leg, the looming numbness and shakiness of his fingers. He feels so, so cold. His adrenaline isn't enough to block it all out.

Izuku stumbles, huffing out larger puffs of cold air as he feels like his lungs are spasming to simply breathe. He raises his head of which he subconsciously lowered, the world blurring just the slightest as he hones in on Todoroki again.

And he doesn't look much better, really. Ice threatens to swallow Todoroki's elbow whole, and the patch of it on his cheek spans from the edge of his eye to the bottom of his chin, crossing around his mouth and threatening to go to the other half of his face. There are small scrapes along his arms. His footwork is shaky.

"Why are... you going so far?" Todoroki seems to force, returning his stare.

Izuku has to take a moment, not to think, but to gather the strength to speak at all. "E-Everyone... Everyone else is," he responds. "Don't you... see? Everyone's *tried*. E-Even... Even Ashido, during your. Your match before this one. I-I can't..." He struggles to lift his arm but does so anyway, curling his index finger and aiming it forward. His aim is shaky. "I *c-can't*... can't give up like this!

"And you... you can't, either." Izuku lets his arm drop when Todoroki makes no move, just... recovering. "I *won't* let you. So... so Todoroki, I have to ask you. I-Is your reasoning... still the same? To reject your father, t-to... to half-heartedly win what everyone gave their all for... to win on the verge of death... is that what you want? Is that *fucking it?!*"

Todoroki is silent.

That frustration from before hails over him, overwhelming nearly every rational thought he has. When he continues, Izuku's voice ramps up its volume higher not of his own violation, but of a need for Todoroki to understand before Izuku does something *reckless*. "Does w-winning right now... matter more than your future, *huh?!* Showing... Showing your *father* you're better than m-me is more important, *huh?!* Making the world see how c-capable you are by l-limiting yourself... Being first place... it all matters *more* than *killing yourself, is that right?!*"

Todoroki says nothing. Izuku scowls. "Stop s-screwing around!" He screams, moving forward one foot after the other. "Is that all wh-what being a hero is to you?! Answer me, Todoroki...! *Answer me, goddamn it!*"

Todoroki says nothing. Todoroki looks at him and clenches his teeth and scowls as if Izuku knows nothing, and maybe he does. Maybe Izuku doesn't know a hint of the horrors he's gone through even with a brief summary of it all, that summary barely scraping the surface of how horrible Endeavor is. Maybe he'll never understand it. But Izuku, he doesn't care right now, can't bring himself to, because all he wants is to wrench his fist into Todoroki's gut again so that it might give him his common sense back.

And he does. Izuku trudges ahead, step by step, bit by bit, even as Todoroki's side gets covered in ice like a warning. He reels his dominant fist back, fuels it with ten percent of OFA, and rams it into Todoroki's gut before he can even move. It's satisfying, even when he feels his hand crack. It's *cathartic*.

Izuku stands there, broken fist lingering in the air, and breathes. He looks up when Todoroki shifts somewhere on the ground, soon swaying on his feet and mumbling so quietly he can barely hear it. "I... my old man's power..."

"What... W-What are you *talking* about?!" Izuku says, a desperate, partially hysterical tone weaved in there. His fist lowers, laying limp at his side. "You're not *Endeavor*, Todoroki! It's... *It's your Quirk, isn't it?!*"

Something in the air shifts. Izuku tenses, moving his injured leg back subconsciously—

Todoroki's left half of his face bursts into flame. The fire curls, swirls, and then becomes a coiling, towering whirlwind that spirals in the air, seemingly consuming Todoroki whole. Izuku gasps at the sudden change in temperature and a subsequent *explosion* of wind and steam, feeling both boiling and freezing as he raises his forearms up in an attempt to block it all. Superheating an environment thoroughly cooled isn't good at all, but if it gets Todoroki to do *something*, then that's fine.

The fire sears the concrete beneath them loudly, filling the air with an intangible weight once its own tempest passes. Any ice debris that surrounds them melts in an instant, the floor becoming wet and slippery; equally as quick, it all evaporates, rising steam flowing from the ground as if it were baking. Izuku feels his leg and arms prickle as he's forced a few feet back, able to trace the scars on them in his head with an equal presence of fear, yet he bares his teeth and *smiles*.

It's what Todoroki sees when the tempest subsides only partly, still raging on his left half of his body. Ice melts off his skin, slipping off his cheek, and turning into steam and oppressing winds just as quickly. Izuku hadn't even known his skin was paler on that side, but now, it's already gaining color.

"My reasoning..." He starts, shifting his stance. "I... I want to be a hero, too. Like all of you. So I..." Todoroki's lips tug up until he's smiling, too, returning Izuku's with equal fervor. "I won't give up, either!"

Izuku grins wider, a feral tilt to it.

This is dangerous. He shouldn't have provoked Todoroki like this. He can't fight fire like he could with ice. And yet, this is the best rash thing Izuku's ever done in his life.

"Then," Izuku says, stepping forward with his injured leg. His adrenaline renews itself, pumping through his veins and numbing his pain. "How about you—"

He shoots forward with ten percent of OFA in his legs and twenty in his dominant hand, forgoing all his caution as he faces Todoroki in an instant. He reels his fist back and aims it where Todoroki's solar plexus is, punching soon after.

"—*SHOW ME THAT RESOLVE!*"

Shouto dodges. He ducks under and around Midoriya's swing, missing the surge of wind pressure and the draft that follows by a hair's breadth. Exhilaration flows through his veins, his own special adrenaline, one that makes him smile wider. Shouto has fought many, many times, most, if not all of them against his father, and yet *nothing* has been as exciting as this.

Exciting. How foreign that feeling is.

Whirling around to Midoriya's back, Shouto raises his hand and sends a streak of flames across the concrete platform. It sears the ground, sets it alight, gains force from the wind the cold around it causes, makes his once-freezing blood *sing*, and where he would've felt disgust once he only feels the thrill of battle. Of course, Midoriya meets his flames as he pivots on the heel of his good leg, easily throwing a gust of wind his way. It blasts his flames back, surrounding him with heat at his sides, and as Shouto crouches and forms a pillar of ice to block it all even with the definite bruising on his gut, he wants to laugh.

That's new, too. All of this is. How *thrilling*.

They begin weaving into a dance only they know, fire and ice and the gales of the sky meeting perfectly against each other. Shouto feels as wild as his flames as he sets flare after flare on his opponent, alighting the field in oranges and yellows and reds. Midoriya twists the fire with his wind, creating deadly twisters of flame right at him. Shouto's ice counters it swiftly, so much easier to control now, and though it bursts into steam and gives Midoriya an advantage, Shouto freezes the puddles of water left behind and glides along it.

Midoriya shatters it all anyway by slamming his injured leg down with his Quirk. He doesn't break the platform, unfortunately, instead sweeping the foot of that same leg up and across, throwing a barrage of sharp ice towards him. Shouto sweeps his hand across, spewing fire out of his palm like a flamethrower. It melts all of the ice and fogs his vision with a little steam that hisses, but it's not loud enough for him to ignore Midoriya's movement.

His grin is hurting his cheeks (this is the longest he's smiled since... ages ago) but he keeps it on as he meets Midoriya's predictive blow with a wall of ice. It explodes instantaneously, thrown back and sending a cold front into Shouto's face. Some shards scrape his skin, larger pieces like hail as they slam into him, but he sets a wall of ice behind him again and squints through the wind, seeing Midoriya raising his less-injured hand with the finger he used a dark purple. All of his finger are, really, and so is his leg. Both legs, though one is more red than purple. When did he use both legs?

Shouto falters, reminded of his and his once-brother's own skin on Those Days, but when Midoriya curls one of his other fingers, he has no choice but to block with more ice.

The momentum of their dance after that slows. Between blows, Midoriya begins to make a pained noise, taking longer and longer to recuperate. Shouto slows his pace for him, wanting to enjoy this thrill more, this never-ending adrenaline that fuels him so.

It all stops. Shoto can't keep something like this going forever, he knows that. But more specifically, *Midoriya* stops, head down, after blowing away another wave of Shoto's ice. His legs are shaking. His arms are limp. At this form, Shouto pauses.

Midoriya lifts his head only to give Shouto a tired, beaming smile. It looks like it takes all of his energy. "Glad you had fun," he whispers, only able to be heard by him, and then—

And then Midoriya... collapses. Shouto rushes up to him just as he's about to hit the floor, catching him by his shoulders just in time. His arms sting, and with a near-silent huff, Shouto rights Midoriya's unconscious body. It's the only reason why he's able to realize that because he's used his (not *Endeavor's*) fire, half his shirt's charred off.

Shouto's body burns in a good way. Yes, he's genuinely exhausted in a good way, a thought that gives him a sense of awe. He's never been a good tired. He's only been a painful canvas of ugly bruises and burns.

The thing that jolt him out of it is Midnight's sudden voice announcing the end of the match, loud even with its lowered solemnity, and the quiet cheers from the crowd that follow after. Shouto flinches, subconsciously letting go of Midoriya's shoulders only to latch onto them again with greater ferocity. Midoriya makes a whimper, and Shouto loosens his grip, spotting a medical team already rushing out to greet them in his peripheral. They usher the two of them away and to Recovery Girl's, probably going to do a thousand or so check-ups after their fight.

...There's a weird stretch to his cheeks still. As they leave the eyes of the crowd, Shouto touches his mouth, mystified.

He's still smiling. A small, gentle one, yes, but smiling nonetheless—and, well, it can stay on a little longer, can't it?

Tommy is going to have a Prime-damned aneurysm, and he's sure Toshinori's already gotten a heart attack and spurted out a shit ton of blood even though the few golden apples he'd ate at Takoda had mostly stopped that.

He sighs loudly, ruffling his hair absentmindedly with his unoccupied hand. Bits of debris and ice fall out along with a shit ton of dust, because Izuku and Todoroki couldn't just have a normal battle that didn't reach the stands like a thousand feet higher than them. Tommy sighs again, approaching Recovery Girl's—well, *Chiyo's* (temporary) office with a few golden apple juice... "potions" in his hand. Those little concentrated vials he made for the USJ.

She already knows about them. Had to, when Izuku used them to heal Aizawa. She wanted to keep a few for herself just in case, but Tommy doesn't trust her despite her allowing him to use her first name, so she has to wait for him to come by and shit. It's tedious as hell, but better than Chiyo spreading golden apple serums around or something. They even have a nickname for it: "ambrosia," or whatever that is.

Entering the clinic, Tommy grimaces at the way Izuku's propped up on a bed, eye glancing over all the bandages and casts with hints of his injuries showing through. He's used to that, yeah, but it's ugly as hell. Nearby, Chiyo chuckles without mirth on a chair, having turned to see who entered the room.

"Got the '*ambrosia*,' Recov," Tommy announces, speaking the word ambrosia as if it were a nonsensical thing. This time, when Chiyo laughs, there's a little more warmth in it.

"Thank you, darling," she says, raising a hand for it. Tommy obliges, giving her one of the little vials of the juice. She smiles at him warmly, hopping off her chair with it in hand. Gently unsealing the vial, Chiyo sets some of the juice on her fingers, her touch featherlight when she starts covering Izuku's injuries with it. The bruises start fading as if they never were there, and sharp cracks and pops ring aloud as his bones mend themselves together.

Toshinori awes at it from where he sits next to Izuku's bed with a curious sort of horror. "That will never grow old to me." He mumbles, watching scrapes seal themselves together while Chiyo backs away. Tommy nods in agreement as the hero-nurse gives him the glass vial back, subconsciously storing it in his inventory. Seeing the first wounds he'd gotten from the L'Manburg wars pinch themselves together like they were living while spewing pink steam hurt, mainly, but it was also fucking *cool*.

The room falls into silence until Izuku's finished regenerating, a pained furrow to Izuku's brows even in his sleep.

"...You could have some more yourself, old man," Tommy says quietly, looking away. "I have a limited supply, yeah, and it won't completely heal your wound since it's also old, but. You *could*. You did once. Twice. ...However many times."

Toshinori takes a breath, maybe. "That's alright, Young Tommy," he replies, a smile in his voice, "but even with that, I've realized that I will never be in my prime again. Now that what you've given me did numb the pain, I'm quite alright with that." He does something that makes the chair he sits on creak. "And my wound, well. It is quite a sight, but I think it's become a part of me now."

Tommy stays silent in the face of that. Finally, he sighs tiredly. "You're fucking *weird*. Who wants to keep a thing like that?"

Toshinori chuckles warmly. Instead of saying something else, he grabs the empty chair next to him, pulling it out and looking at him. Tommy debates it a little, considers his gut feeling, thinks a little more, and then moves over to sit down.

"Bakugo an' Todoroki are up next," he comments out of the blue, and whether it be to Chiyo or Toshinori or Izuku or nothing, it doesn't matter. "It's gonna be a shitshow, I'd think."

He continues, leaving his theories about the battle out in the open. It's an Izuku thing, something that kid's put on him like Tommy has for him, and it's mildly embarrassing, but he says it all if only to fill the silence. Toshinori pipes in with his own suggestions and ideas, as well as Chiyo, though only sometimes. Despite that, it's peaceful. Calm.

Though his gut is still at unease (was it because of Iida, or something else?) his paranoia subsides for just this moment, a breath of fresh air Tommy will take with greed.

("Hehe, sorry." Is the first fucking thing Izuku says when he regains consciousness and is able to voice a rational thought, shit-eating [strained] grin and all. Tommy bonks him on the head with irritation while Toshinori gives Izuku a fondly exasperated look.

The slow inevitability of Tommy running out of golden apples is unsaid.)^[4]

According to the class, Bakugo won the fight, but that's because Todoroki basically faced one of his signature attacks head-on without blocking it. Could've been because of trauma or something; after all, when he and Izuku were fighting, Izuku was all like "it's your power!" and that did some shit. Could've also been because he was tired. Maybe he just thought Bakugo wasn't worth wasting fire for. Regardless, it ended with Bakugo getting knocked out by Midnight. (His gut coils, a sour feeling on his tongue.)

Tommy stands near the whole winner ceremony thing as a sort of supervisor since he technically is staff. Everyone's eccentric here, so he probably doesn't stand out too much being by Class 1-A's side—of which Iida still isn't a part of right now, which is weird. He did had to go for some emergency, though.

He picks at his bandages as Kayama walks back on stage, the crowd buzzing with anticipation even though they already know who's won and shit, and their jitters makes him more—not anxious. Tommy Innit does not get anxious. But... energized? Tense. This entire event's given him constant paranoia, and this moment is no exception, as with every step Kayama takes, Tommy's gut-feeling worsens. (It hasn't fallen below a "get ready to fight" level ever since Todoroki won against Izuku.)

And then, in a burst of confetti and smoke, the placement podiums are raised up.

Izuku... is not on the third place podium, and neither is Momo. He's literally climbing to first place, disregarding any good impressions heroes got from him as he grasps something metal on the higher podium and starts charging OFA. Momo is, too, with a lot more struggling as she forces herself up. Todoroki's taken one glance at where they were looking, and that's all it took for his face to go colder and for him to get up there, too. Tommy's gaze quickly turns to the first place podium—

Bakugo thrashes there in *chains*, voice muffled and strained. His arms and legs are held back, and there's a muzzle around his mouth, leather straps around his head to make sure it stays. He glances at his hands frequently with panic in his eyes, sweat dripping off his skin, but there are no explosions. Quirk-disabling cuffs, his mind hazily supplies. They've put *Quirk-disabling cuffs* on him. *This* is why Tommy's gut feels like shit.

And then, Bakugo is in a box. Or maybe he isn't, because between one moment and the next, Tubbo's head of hair peeks out from the small entrance the obsidian gave him. A single eye, brilliant blue and only filled with fear, stares up at him. A wound Technoblade gave him earlier with his axe makes his shoulder bleed profusely, staining his suit. Tubbo moves back behind the obsidian. He might be the one screaming.

Tommy blinks. Again, again, and again, until the illusion fades and he is faced with history repeating itself.

The smell of gunpowder soon wafts into his nose, fireworks exploding in his ears. All of that is overwhelmed by how much the crowd is—is *cheering*, cheering for whatever the fuck this is. Kayama herself is *smiling*, and out of nowhere, Technoblade stands behind her, his long pink hair matching with hers as it sways in the breeze. Her whip—his crossbow—is limp in his. Her grip. Techno's cape billows in the wind like it did at the Festival.

Wilbur stands next to him, too, the scent of the cigarettes he so regularly smoked filling Tommy's lungs. Tommy glances to the side with a wide eye, still facing forward. The brunet doesn't return his gaze, instead looking down at the Sports Festival. Tommy can't read his face. (Tommy never could, after Pogtopia. He can't do anything at all. How fucking pathetic.)

"Wilbur," Tommy quietly manages through gritted teeth, his voice almost drowned by the cheers and shouts of the crowd. He stares at the first-place podium, at Tubbo's—Bakugo's writhing form. He blinks, and Schlatt stands there on that same podium, right next to a box that suddenly surrounds Tu—Bakugo's chained body. *"Wilbur."*

Give the signal, he wants to say. Give Tommy a reason to go out there and scream how all of this is so fucked up and make him wreck another Festival.

But the man gives no salvation like that. Tommy cannot move. Tommy can barely breathe. (*"We should've known, Toms; safe havens don't exist for a world as wicked as this—for people as wicked as us."*)

Izuku is shouting as he shatters a chain, he thinks. The people stop cheering. (The fireworks are still ringing.)

"...chain him up like this?!" Izuku screams in unbridled, unfathomable fury as he tries to use OFA to break the chains while avoiding further injury. He clasps one of the anti-Quirk cuffs, but that seems to sap OFA's power even when Izuku isn't the one under it. They're high-quality cuffs, then, not some cheap ones that were mindlessly bought. Not ones without *intention*. "Bakugo didn't want this! He didn't want *any* of this! Help me! Let him GO, Midnight! *LET KACCHAN GO!"*

Izuku's rage is unreal because he's so kind even when he's feral; because Izuku couldn't even be truly mad at the man who told him he couldn't be a hero and the boy who's tormented him for a decade and this is what makes him break. And really, all of this doesn't seem real, either. Tommy prays to Prime that this isn't real, just some new fucking hallucination his mind's made to mock him as he watches Momo make a pair of pliers to help cut it while Todoroki assists with his flames.

Kayama's expression falters—at least, Tommy thinks so. The world is burning and blurring and people are screaming and Technoblade is laughing, all of it into one messy war that Tommy can barely comprehend. But, he does know that Aizawa's voice, soon resounding and permeating the air with rage and disappointment, makes sure her expression falls, shattering in a million pieces as she realizes what is going on. *"Midnight!"* The teacher roars, Yamada horrified and speechless next to him. "What is this?!"

That jump-starts her into action, forcing her to move even when Aizawa's still talking. She's silent as she works, unclasping the other metal bonds around Bakugo's limbs that the other winning students hadn't already broken, as well as the muzzle around his mouth. Everyone's silent, everyone's *ashamed*—Tommy thinks it's hysterical that Izuku *and* Aizawa had to say something for all of them to *shut the*

fuck up. (The silence amplifies the relieved gulps of air Bakugo takes, but it's another scream in a war-riddled land to Tommy. One he can only watch as it destroys itself all over again.)

He can't focus on it anymore. Tommy glances to the side again, seeing Wilbur—except, someone else phases through him, eliminating the illusion. No, something else: an invisible appendage that pierces the hallucination like a plane would to a mass of clouds, one that hesitates before setting itself on Tommy's shoulder. A hand.

Tommy looks up. There's a floating sports uniform and crinkles of his shirt where the hand is. Hagakure. "...Breathe," she commands, her voice barely able to be heard. The rest of the class is looking at him. Horror is etched on their faces. "Tommy. *Breathe.*"

One of his own hands goes to settle itself gently over his chest as he looks back in front of him. Yes, Tommy realizes, he does need to breathe. He forgot ever since his mind started playing fucking tricks, and it's why the world is fuzzy.

Tentatively, Tommy does what Hagakure asks, her hand still on his shoulder, a grounding presence. His eye darts to the side after noticing something: his inventory's open, its interface a little less glitched. His off-hand is hovering over the Axe of Peace's icon. With a wave, he dismisses the hologram, letting his hand fall.

Hagakure lets go. Tommy looks back up. Bakugo is freed, but no one is cheering. There is only silence as Midnight and Bakugo are led away.

Tommy forces his head down. He can't stand out, and yet... "None of this is right," he says, his hushed voice warbling despite his best efforts to keep it neutral. "Fucking none of it is."

Hagakure takes a moment to respond. "It is," she murmurs.

"None of the heroes around here helped. Only Aizawa."

"Yeah."

"It's supposed to be *safe* here."

"...It is."

tommy wants to hunch into himself. Tubbo won't stop screaming, and if tommy looks up, he might just see debris and blood instead. everything is floating. everything is unreal. (it has to be. someone aizawa trusts wouldn't chain a student up and let it be.)

His mind severs itself from his body. tommy doesn't know when the silent chaos ends. tommy can feel himself moving at some point, following the class. out the stadium, along a path back to u.a. the halls close in on him. tommy goes to his lounge. it's suffocating. he remembers every single escape path he'd made during his first time here.

he maps them again. safety is never a guarantee.

Tomura looks at the screen with rapt attention, watching the heroes' blunder with a gleeful smile. His hand comes to his neck out of habit, fingers resting along his scarred, dry skin, occasionally twitching. Underneath Father, a pleased smile tugs at his lips, and for once, he doesn't feel a bubbling rage when thinking about Eraserhead.

This is what the heroes truly are underneath their saccharine smiles and propaganda. Sickening bastards who seem to care less about the mental states of students. With a little nudge in the right direction, Tomura can already read the headlines of news articles all over, connecting this little stunt to the USJ. *Is this how U.A. truly treats their students?* They'd ask. *Leaving them to fend for themselves with villains, and chaining them up on stage?*

How *glorious*.

"Master Tomura." At the call of his name, Tomura anchors himself back into reality, feeling his hand at his neck once again scratching away his skin thoughtfully. Flakes of almost-dust linger under his fingernails and coat his fingers, visible even with the dim lighting of the run-down bar and the flickering, old TV screen. He forces his hand away, looking up at Kurogiri under Father.

"What?" He demands, less heat in his voice than usual.

"Do not be reckless," the mist warns. "Though the reputation of heroes will be lowered significantly at this spectacle, this is just the beginning. Little by little, we will chip at the heroes until we can fell them in one swoop."

Tomura huffs. "I know that." Pausing, he tilts his head. "...That mind controller, and that shadow bird. They could be strong. Will we add them to the list, too?"

Kurogiri shakes his head. "Shinsou Hitoshi is of Class 1-C. There will be no opportunity to get him. On the other hand, Tokoyami Fumikage is far too... heroic. Regardless, we will not be able to convince either of them; Bakugo Katsuki is the closest to villainy."

"Right. ...Oi, Kurogiri."

"Yes, Master Tomura?"

"You've been cleaning those glasses ever since Endeavor's son won against that bush. What's up with that?"

"...I've felt just a—fluctuation, of sorts, in the space between my portals. Nothing significant."

A quiet, incoherent grumble. "Better not be."

Kurogiri stays silent.

Chapter End Notes

1. im, once again, not creative enough to change any of this. but also uraraka's like a Real BAMF in this, and she also gets character development, and who am i to take that from her ?? the best i could do was at least make her happy at how well she did, yk? sorry 's not written well ,, wasn't too sure how to wjahsgjd,,[\[return to text\]](#)

the strongest flashlight in the world is an imalent ms18. it can produce 100,000 lumens. that is Very Fucking Bright. the light can go for 1,350 meters (around 4429ft). it prolly would've blinded fumi in an instant, had dark shadow not taken most of the blow[\[return to text\]](#)

i feel like 'cause kiri didn't stand out n stuff, no one but ashido n his family really payed attention to him. he was a loner, practically a ghost to everyone around him. so his mindset, though subconsciously, is all like "why are you paying attention to me" since he's prolly had to deal w everythin himself. idk im basing this off of what i remember from his backstory and it aint a lot sooo,, [\[return to text\]](#)

toshinori does not reveal that he's quirkless here. that's for another time smile :) [\[return to text\]](#)

fallout.

Chapter Notes

for some reason, i somehow thought that cementoss was in charge of the u.a. support course ??? and not power loader ?????? i've been fuckin confused this entire time until i wrote this chapter; if i made some sort of plothole 'cause of it please let me know,,,,

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Clementine is in his lap when Tommy "wakes up." There's no windows in the animal habitats place, so he can't tell what time it is or how long he's been here. Or when he even got there. (Hadh't he been in his lounge? He isn't sure.) But Koda sits nearby, offering a fluffy bunny to someone else—judging by their coos, Ashido. There's another voice, too, somewhere Tommy can't focus on since it's out of sight and a little far. It's probably Izuku. Relaxing just the slightest, Tommy starts to pet Clementine's head.

Some movement stops. "You alright there, Tommy?" Ashido asks.

"Yeah," Tommy responds dazedly, looking at her. "I think. What time's it?"

"About, uh..." Ashido turns to look at something. Someone. "Mido! What time's it?"

"Uh..." There's a pause. "Nnnnineteen thirty-four? ...No, no, I was wrong, sorry—twenty thirty-four!"

Twenty thirty-four... that'd be far after the Fe—*Sports* Festival. (What fucking sports *those* were.)

Something must've shown on Tommy's face because Ashido smiles at his expression, devoid of mirth. "Yeah, they cancelled the awards ceremony early," she says, her smiling face faltering into something solemn. She keeps petting the bunny in her hands, peering into its beady black eyes instead of him. "It was like... mid-afternoon-ish. The Sports Festival went on for, uh... about six or seven hours in general? Something like that. Usually goes on for longer. The staff are still dealing with press and all due to the whole, um, event, so they've let us go.

"Me, Koda, Midoriya, and Sato got perms to stay and watch you until it's all mostly sorted out, or when it hits mi—ah, night-time. Hagakure wanted to stay, too, but her parents said no. Sato's gone home to reheat some of his baked leftovers, and he's bringing back the goods now."

A part of him bristles; Tommy Innit does *not* need to be watched. Even so, he chuckles bittersweetly, still sort of in a haze as his mind focuses on an entirely different point. "The goods. Like drugs."

Ashido nods, her face solidifying into further seriousness. Her lips are twitching at the edges, though, so it's all in jest. "Like drugs," she agrees easily. "I demanded that all the sugar would be put into whatever I got, so I'm going to be hyper as hell."

Koda narrows his eyes at her. Not in here, he signs. Go eat outside.

Ashido dramatically sets a hand on her chest, holding the bunny carefully in her other one. "Uh! I'm not a messy eater!"

If bits of glaze from the doughnuts you asked for get on the floor, the animals here eat it, and then they get all hyper, get poisoned, or die, I'm telling them that you're their dealer.

Gasping, Ashido slumps in defeat. "Fine, fine," she concedes with a smile, her tone of a chastised kid. "I won't eat in here. Would be hilarious to be a sugar dealer, though!"

Koda nods in satisfaction, going back to handling more rabbits. Tommy, who'd been absentmindedly paying attention to their conversation, leaves his hand on Clementine's head. She makes a curious noise before rising a little, the movement making his hand rise with her, and Tommy is so very thankful for Clementine's existence. "Your parents know or something?" He asks.

"They do!" Izuku answers, his voice closer. He enters Tommy's line of vision, plopping onto the ground with a sigh. His clothes and hands are dirty. "Th-They were all worried at first because of the—the *ceremony*," he says, hissing the last word with venom, "but we all, um, called them and everything. Mom's bought some Coca-Cola for you."

Tommy perks up, a little more of that haziness leaving his mind as he listens. "Coca-Cola?! Oh, fuck yeah!" He exclaims, the volume startling Clementine who jerks away. In an instant, Tommy's attention is back to her, now whispering countless apologies as she plops her head back into his lap.

"What!" Ashido cries, "He got to see your parents?!"

"Parent," Izuku corrects, gesturing towards Koda with both hands. They look at him curiously before their eyes widen, and soon enough, there's a pair of bunnies nestled into Izuku's hands. He cradles them to his chest, his face breaking out into a smile. "And yeah, he did—like a year before this, really. Suck it."

Ashido gasps loudly, a pleased smile on her face. Sometimes, Tommy forgets that Izuku isn't a little shit in front of everyone. "Ugh, how unfair!" She pouts jokingly. Tommy only nods along.

The door to the animal habitats creaks open. Tommy's able to turn his head, of which reveals Sato balancing several boxes on one arm. "Food's ready!" He announces, moving to take another step in.

Koda fucking teleports or something, already pushing him out and trying not to knocking the boxes of desserts down. Outside! Go to Gladiolus' lounge!^[1] He furiously signs after Sato disappears behind the door again, the baker yelping "okay, okay!" Then, with a serene, soft smile, Koda turns back to the three of them. Let's go.

Ashido laughs, already setting the bunny in her grasp down with Izuku doing the same. Reluctantly, Tommy parts with Clementine, giving her a little wave before leaving the wildlife habitats, his head clearer than when he regained consciousness.

The sweets and desserts and pastries and all were *real* fucking good. He got to try glazed doughnuts and soft mochi and even *softer* cheesecake and sweet rollcakes! All of them had different flavors an' shit, too!

Sato had made sure the baked goods he chose weren't overwhelming in their taste when he originally made them, making everything something that Tommy could easily get down without wanting to throw up. Said they tasted better when fresh, and holy *shit* Tommy can't wait to try them when they are. (And, he was able to eat five servings of the baked goods! Five! It still isn't like before the Dream SMP, but it's progress!)

Though they did linger for a bit, they all had to leave eventually. Izuku and Koda got tired, while Ashido and Sato's parents were still jittery about the whole situation. It didn't matter; Tommy still got to keep a shit ton of pastries from Sato, of which he all shoved into his inventory. It was also enough that the four of them stayed at all.

Now, what would make Tommy's mood even higher were if he were to get to his house and continue mining instead of staying here for a fucking *staff meeting*. All the other students got to fucking go home for like half a week or some shit so that the drama can settle down, and yet because Tommy is an established teacher's assistant, he's technically a part of the staff, which is un-*fucking*-fair!

At the reminder of why he's even wandering U.A.'s halls right now, Tommy huffs, frowning. He glances out at the glass walls of the building, seeing the sun still in the air, and huffs even louder. Prime, he doesn't wanna go... Staff meetings are boring! (And he knows he won't like this one.)

A set of footsteps start walking closer to him. Pausing, Tommy whirls himself around—to see nothing behind him. There wasn't anything ahead of him, either, so it has to be from one of the long corridors this building has. And the person... their shoes are clacking against the floor, so it's not regular shoes. Pretty light, so it must be a hero. Who wears high heels...?

Oh.

Her.

Tommy does not move, as tense as a taut rubber band ready to snap. He turns back forward to see Kaya—Midnight appearing from a hall.

She looks haggard, even in the formal clothes she wears. Her hair's a mess compared to her usual wild hairstyle. Her steps are slower. There might be a slouch to her posture and bags under her eyes. When Kayama turns and sees him, her eyes widen, and yeah, those are definitely eyebags.

She opens her mouth. "To—!"

"Shut up," Tommy snaps. Midnight does, simply watching Tommy start to walk past her.

"W-Wait," she begins again, "I just—"

Tommy scowls. "Shut *up*!" He repeats, his voice reverberating in the halls of U.A., its volume barely anything compared to the height of his rage right now. Tommy turns around to her, baring his teeth in a way he hasn't done since the beginning of his year-or-so of being here. "Just *shut the fuck up*! Fucking—just go to the damn meeting! I don't want to hear you right now! I don't *care* about what you have to say here either! And if it's about forgiveness, or some shit like that? *Forget it.*"

He whirls back around before Midnight can respond, storming off. There are, thankfully, several ways to get to the meeting room, so Tommy weaves through the longest path, doing anything in his power to avoid her loud fucking heels.

(Some part of him thinks that if Tommy could forgive Eret, then he certainly could forgive her in due time.

...He'll have to see.)

When he gets to the room, his anger is still simmering somewhat. Tommy barely resists the urge to slam the door down, instead taking a deep breath, and then taking a dozen more internally as he opens

the door and walks inside.

Toshinori, Aizawa, Yamada, Chiyo, Cementoss (oh fucking *boy* does Tommy want to scream at him too, because now that he remembers it, wasn't Bakugo chained on a *concrete* pole?), Nedzu himself, *Midnight*... There's a few other people he can't recognize, but mostly everyone except those not involved with the Sports Festival are present. Tommy takes the last vacant seat, thankfully very far away from Midnight, and leans back.

"Alright!" Nedzu claps once, an empty smile on his face instead of the jovial one he usually has. "Now that everyone's here, we can begin the meeting."

"You all already know what this main topic is about," he continues. "That is, the end of this year's Sports Festival; or more specifically, what occurred in the awards ceremony." Nedzu does not sugarcoat his reprimanding gaze when he looks at Midnight. She seems to flinch at all the attention placed on her, for once not sucking it all up and preening.

"Kayama," Nedzu starts. "Would you like to explain?"

For a moment, there was only a tense silence. And then, Midnight sighs tiredly, brushing a few strands of her hair out of her face. She doesn't look up, her eyes honed in on the edge of the table. "I... It's..."

She sighs again. "I would like to start off with by saying that I now recognize that my actions are inexcusable," Midnight establishes. "O-Of course, that doesn't—redeem me or something. I'd just like to make that known." With all the hate she's probably getting on social media, no wonder she knows that.

"As for the entire idea, to... chain Bakugo up... I... this will anger some of you, I know, but I feel as if I've become desensitized to violent methods—if that makes sense." Midnight hunches into herself ashamedly. "It felt—alright to do what I did at the time. I-I didn't think about the consequences, nor did I consider Bakugo's opinion; all I focused on was the attention he was supposed to get, and how his victory should've been shown and celebrated. I guess."

Tommy thinks of Tubbo's screams and Tubbo's scar and Tubbo's dead eye, and Tommy thinks of Techno's panicked eyes and Techno's sadistic glee and Techno's fireworks. What a fucking show those were, huh.

(Tubbo. Tubbo, Tubbo, Tubbo, Tommy's quasi-brother, Tommy's other half. How long has it been since Tommy's thought of him, of his well-being?

He can't think about it. Won't.)

Midnight's voice drags him back out into the present. "That may be because I, well. Because my costume garners it. Attention," she says. "I guess I started, ah... losing my original purpose of being a hero, that being to help others and to inspire other women to take control of what they want, in turn for attention. Fame. Even if it's not my own. B-But I never wanted this type!" Midnight somehow curls in further. "It's pathetic, I know. Once again, I'm sorry."

Tommy almost tells her to shut up again. Almost. Instead, he shoves his simmering anger down and starts playing with the sleeves of his clothes. (His eyes sting.)

"Don't apologize," someone orders, their voice gruff, but Tommy is trying to blink away whatever the fuck's in his eye, his head turned away, and he can't see who said it. It's not Aizawa. "You can't

apologize like that now."

Nedzu nods, visible when Tommy turns his head around. "Though I already have a basis of what to do next, I'd like the opinions of everyone else here."

"A mandatory leave both as a hero and a teacher, most definitely," Aizawa says in an instant. His eyes, usually drooping with sleep, are wide awake and attentive, a smidge of hurt somewhere in there. He's done a good job of hiding it all. "Though revoking her hero license is debatable yet on the table, a mandatory leave will provide a mental health break. However long said leave may be is up to the general consensus for everyone else, as well as how long she thinks it'd take for her to work on herself."

Someone with a broad figure and a dog-like face nods, raising their hand to put the general attention on themselves. "I suggest therapy along with it." They add, a slight growl to their voice. "Though it is good that you recognize your mistakes, Kayama, I'm positive that won't be enough. I know a few therapists who are unbiased towards heroes and their professions; I'll contact them, see if they have an open spot."

Nedzu hums, putting his paws together. "Both of those are ideal. As for the length of Kayama's leave..." His eyes flit up to Midnight. "Your opinion?"

"...A year, at least." She eventually answers.

Nedzu nods, a contemplative expression on his face. "That is valid, but I feel as if that would have to be expanded. It will take ages for the situation to truly die down when the press stops attempting to swarm U.A., especially with how large and impactful the Sports Festival is as well as how intertwined it is with U.A.'s image. The world will not forget—but, with time, it might start to forgive."

"In addition, Kayama's been in the hero world for several years; the damage that's done to her cognition isn't going away in an instant. I say that a few years at least is fine."

"Don't feel like taking her license away is smart, either," Tommy reluctantly adds, staring at his arms instead of everyone else. "Everyone here should know of Toshinori's condition. If someone here doesn't, then you really need to fuckin' know."

Yamada nods. "Everyone here knows," he confirms, his voice uncharacteristically quiet. "And yeah. I do prefer being optimistic, but..." Everyone can tell that Toshinori's weakening. All Might can't be everywhere anymore. "Sorry, but more heroes will be needed."

"It's fine, Yamada," Toshinori says, smiling at him. It's strained. All of his smiles are starting to be. "But, ah—what about her teacher's license?"

"That is out of our power," Nedzu states promptly. "The Board of Education would decide that. The best we can do on our end is to fire Kayama, but she'd still retain her license. Most likely, we'll have to wait for their decree."

"If she keeps her license and continues teaching here," Aizawa tacks on, "don't change Bakugo's schedule. I'm positive that would only enrage him."

The principal smiles. "Noted."

"On the matter of Kayama teaching," someone else pipes in, "would she be allowed to be on-stage for future U.A. Sports Festivals? That is, assuming she will be coming back to U.A. with a teaching

license at all." The person has black skin—or maybe it was a bodysuit of sorts? Anyway, they also have a large tan coat on and a large-ass smile that could give All Might's never-ending one a run for its money. Tommy recognizes him; he's the math teacher. Never got a name, though.

Nedzu seems to purse his lips. "That is... dubious," he vaguely decides, "but it will probably depend on the media's vision of her, as well as Kayama's own mental health state. Most likely, however? No, she will not be permitted to do so in the future." The person in the tan coat nods, going silent.

"Anything to add?" The principal questions the general room. No one says anything. It's a pause that's fit for transition to a new topic, but no way in hell is Tommy letting Cementoss go.

"Hold the fuck up," he interrupts. "This shit ain't done yet."

Nedzu eyes him, not unkindly. "Yes," he agrees, "I was just about to get to that; this matter is not over. Though Kayama's actions are one of the main problems, there are a couple questions: where exactly she got the chains, leather straps, and muzzle from, as well as how it was all set up on the podium. It's easy to deduce her potential assistants; after all, Kayama and Ishiyama were the people mainly in charge of the stadium's operations due to their abilities.

"Furthermore, there are no muzzles or chains, especially not Quirk-limiting ones, in the walls of U.A. unless created in the Support Course—strictly for creations and not for people, of course." He raises an eyebrow, staring at Cementoss and a teacher Tommy doesn't know. "Well, Ishiyama? Maijima?"

"*Don't* rope me into this," the unknown teacher protests. There's some funky gear on his head. "The Quirk-limiting gear was made not long ago, and *not* by me. You remember that one kid—Sonoda Takeshi? That cruel second-year you expelled recently, and who's probably in prison right now? He made that thing.

"I was going to put it all in a furnace, melt whatever metals he used to get every single Quirk effect he put on them gone; God knows how the hell he got the metals at all." The person huffs exasperatedly. "*Someone* took them before I could, though. Either Kayama or Ishiyama, from what we're basing this off of."

Tommy frowns. That... If they expelled him, why not expel—

Midnight shifts, capturing Tommy's attention again. "...I-I did," she admits. Another thing to fucking pile on her list of atrocities.

Cementoss closes his eyes. "I confess, being requested to set up a pole on that podium was suspicious," he says, "and as a hero, it should have been natural for me to be weary. However, I did not think of it much. Though I did not know what Kayama would use it for, I did trust her. And so, I complied."

He hangs his head. "It is not a good excuse, but it is the truth. I will accept all consequences imposed on me."

Tommy thinks Midnight makes a little choked, despairing noise. Despite himself, he finds that there's tears building in his eye, and he looks away.

"...Trusting Kayama—well, *anyone* blindly is a bad decision," a large person with platinum hair eventually speaks out, "but he shouldn't be put on mandatory leave, I'd say. Ishiyama didn't know what Kayama would do. That doesn't make him innocent, just... well, there's no other words for it that

I can think of off the top of my head; he's an unwilling subordinate." Tommy *might* know this person if he thinks about it a little more. They're 1-B's homeroom teacher, Vlad King, if he's right.

"I agree," Aizawa says gruffly, offering no more input.

"An official apology at most would be fine then, yes?" Nedzu asks, his eyes scanning the reactions of all the teachers. Most of them nod, including Tommy.

At this, Nedzu claps once again. "Alright. To conclude, Kayama will be put on mandatory leave for at least a few years, given therapy by someone recommended by Inui." Oh, so that's who that person was. "Maijima had no official involvement, and Cementoss will make an official, sincere apology." When no one opposes him, Nedzu smiles. It's still empty. "While this meeting is being held, are there any matters any of you would like to discuss?"

Tommy raises a hand. "A student. Mineta. He's in 1-A."

Nedzu looks at him. "Ah," he says. "Him. He is... quite problematic."

"Yeah." No shit.

Aizawa cuts in. "We can't expel him."

Nedzu turns to him, what could be surprise etched in his smiling face. "Oh?"

The teacher grumbles. "I expelled the entirety of what would've been 2-A—" Wait, wait, wait, *what?* "—and secretly re-enrolled them because it serves as motivation to become better. In my experience, it's efficient and the swiftest lesson I can teach." A lesson that teaches the fear of Prime in them, holy *shit*.

"But Mineta? If I expelled him but he came back, I doubt he'd have changed. Same thing with not re-enrolling him. If he were to be transferred to a different course, that wouldn't do anything either. He'll just act upon other students."

Aizawa continues, "Expelling, suspending, or transferring him isn't exactly heroic in nature, either; more so unwillingness to help someone like him. Those like Sonoda Takeshi, who are legitimate threats to those around them, are exceptions.

"And so, counselors and therapists are a must. Though we do have counselors and such in the form of Inui and some others, none of them have been made mandatory for those who need it, especially for 1-A. May I know why?"

Nedzu puts his clasped hands onto his lap. "Inui is a guidance counselor; however, he is also Hound Dog." He begins. "You know this well." Tommy pauses, brows furrowing; that's the guy Aizawa's been pushing the class to see... he thinks. He's like eighty percent sure. So Inui's gotta be the guy with the dog-like face.

"Similarly," the principal continues, "the other counselors hired here at U.A. are also pro-heroes. And like Yamada said: with All Might's condition, as well as the USJ Incident that's brought to a rise in crime, I unfortunately doubt that the peace All Might's set up will last. It will become—and already is—arduous to match the counselors' schedules to the ones the students have, especially when it comes to deciding whether or not they should prioritize the lives of others or the mental states of our students."

The solution's quite obvious, innit? "Just hire therapists and counselors unbiased to heroes 'n' villains and shit? That aren't heroes themselves?" Tommy suggests. "Like what Inui said."

However, Inui shakes his head lightly. "It's hard to find those who are resolute in their unbiased justice," he says, his jaw visibly tightening. "Adding onto that, just because they're unbiased never means that they can't be swayed by money, fear, or other such things. Having a potential mole in a place like U.A. isn't good. One of the easier ways to be partially sure that someone isn't corrupt or a double-agent of sorts is if they're a pro hero, and even that's dubious."

Tommy purses his lips. "...Oh."

"Furthermore," Nedzu carries on after the brief interruption is over, "I believe that the students attending therapy is a choice they have to make themselves unless their abstinence is hazardous to those around them. If our students *do* want to recover, forcing therapy on them won't help with their problems; rather, it may cause them to fester. They'll be less willing to participate, treating therapy as an extracurricular activity instead of a place to talk about their issues freely."

...Fuck. He's right. None of them, *especially* those like Izuku, Bakugo, and Todoroki, would talk about their problems. They barely complained after USJ even though they saw their supposed Symbol of Peace wounded and almost saw their fucking teacher die. All of this is fucking foolish but true, and it's *horrible*.

Aizawa seems to agree with the way he sighs, tiredly setting his face into his hands. He eventually moves a hand up to comb away a lot of the greasy hair that fell in front of his eyes, somehow looking more exhausted than he normally does.

"Right," he murmurs, probably mostly to himself. "Because this entire generation is self-sacrificing and emotionally constipated."

Tommy, however, feels more attentive than he thought he'd be. "You're saying that you believe that the class should go to therapy on their own unless them not going is dangerous or some shit like that, right?" He loosely repeats, continuing once he has Nedzu's attention. "Isn't Mineta acting up like, a threat to the girls' mental health, though?"

"I can imagine how scared they are, honestly. Being unable to sleep in fear of someone going through your shit or messing with your body, constantly being paranoid of how much skin you're showing so that people like Mineta aren't leering at you, being on-guard because you're scared what someone like Mineta will do to you if you aren't..." Tommy picks at the bandages on his arms. Weirdly, that's all like his exile except *far* less perverted and alone. "That's the type of shit that'd drive someone mad, I'd think."

"And yeah, we're constantly catching him an' shit, but that doesn't seem to be changing anything. The students are also on his ass about the entire thing, too, yet Mineta just—doesn't care?" Tommy frowns, his fingers moving to rub the edge of his sleeve between them. "I don't know. It's weird. All of it is."

Inui hums, contemplative. It's the only thing that fills the sudden thoughtful, quiet atmosphere of the room.

Finally, Nedzu leans back slightly. "If Mineta's convinced to go to therapy, then he'll stay in the hero course—or the school in general—for a chance to redeem himself," he decides. "If not, then sooner or later, if his acts get more extreme or the complaints more frequent, I'm afraid I will have to expel him." He pauses. "Regardless, I will begin to alert other hero schools of his behavior so as to limit—or even eliminate—his chances of being a hero in any other place. Is this satisfactory?"

...How the hell are Tommy and Aizawa gonna convince Mineta to do that. He isn't really close to anyone besides Kaminari, but he probably doesn't want to interact with Mineta for as long as he can. If Kaminari's forced to, Mineta might just fucking... get angry? As if him getting therapy was the only reason they got close again or something.

Tommy frowns. Reluctantly, he nods, shoving away the thought of how that's even going to work for now. He'll improvise or some shit, it'll be fine.

Everyone else must've nodded, too, because Nedzu leans forward again and says: "If no one will protest, this topic shall be concluded. Anything else to discuss?"

Silence.

The principal smiles. "Alright, then! I, myself, have a couple things to add, and then this meeting will be dissolved.

"Tommy," Nedzu starts. "As teacher assistant, I assume that Aizawa, Yamada, and Kayama had informed you of your role in the beginning? If not, then it's that you are to help teachers out with their classes. Though this was designated specifically for 1-A due to recent incidents, that does not mean that it's entirely exclusive to it.

"And as everyone else knows, students in the Hero Course are going to take hero internships." Hero internships? Tommy can't ponder on it for long, not when Nedzu announces: "Thus, when those begin, you will be assigned to the Support Course until those weeks are over."

"What?!" Tommy shouts, practically jackknifing up from where he sat back on his chair. He mutters a lowered apology, wincing at how loud he was, but he can't help but raise his voice a little again. "Wait—not 1-B or some shit? Why support?"

The person with the headgear straightens in their own seat. "Hey! The Support Course classes are chaotic, but not as much as 1-A!"

"Students in the Hero Course are going to take hero internships," Nedzu repeats over them. "That does include 1-B, if you've forgotten." Tommy slumps. He had forgotten that.

"...Alright," he eventually answers, straightening up with a grunt. "Yeah, yeah, I'll fucking do that, sure. What's the other thing, then?"

"That the near-daily training everyone in Class 1-A has done will be reduced back to every Tuesday and Thursday," the principal replies. "I fear the non-stop exhaustion of their Quirk and physical prowess will stress their bodies out too much, and considering the addition of U.A.'s upgraded security, I think it would be alright to reduce it. Furthermore, it gives more time for their actual education."

Aizawa only thinks about it for a quarter of a minute before nodding, probably prioritizing the physical health of his students instead of their attack power, but Nedzu's words have Tommy shifting in his seat. Paranoia lingers in the back of his mind scraping against his mind as if to remind him that this was a safe place, and that if his students are gonna be here, they're gonna learn how to fight at all costs, yet... They're not gonna be able to fight if they're already dying of exhaustion.

But hell, U.A.'s "upgraded security?" Pandora's Vault had like a *thousand* fucking measures going for it, yet look where Tommy is. (Tommy sets a hand on his wrist, feeling his pulse to remind himself that this shit is real and he is alive.)

...What choice does he have though? U.A.'s practically the best fuckin' hero school in Japan besides its rival—shit, what was it... Shike-something. Whatever the fuck it was, Tommy doesn't think it can hold something as grand as the U.A.'s Sports Festival, nor project it nationally. U.A. has more profit, so if anyone can buy, make, or strengthen the strongest security measures, it'd be them.

Sighing quietly, Tommy slumps in his seat, running a hand through his hair. The inside of his cheek hurts; had he been chewing on it? "Fuck it," he says, his hand moving from his hair to the straps of his eyepatch. Just picking on it, not taking it off. "Yeah. 'Kay, do that."

Despite it starting as a slight worried look towards Tommy, Nedzu smiles with too many teeth. "Good! Then I announce that this meeting is over!"

(Tommy slaps his forehead in the middle of the hall, hunching over himself and burying his face into his hands with a groan. Prime fucking *damn it*, he forgot to ask why that second-year was expelled but Bakugo isn't despite his clear... not-heroic behavior.)

Thankfully, that was the only meeting that Tommy had to attend that break. The others were all about the press and media and shit, and because Tommy isn't supposed to be in the public eye, he doesn't have to care about any of that. (He does feel very, very sorry for Aizawa, though; Tari's said that he's become the earliest customer she has [like standing-at-the-door-when-the-cafe-opens], that he gets like ten coffees immediately, and he looks even more exhausted every passing morning.)

Right now, Tommy gently nudges the soft, pastel brown foam art on a cup of coffee with a spoon, watching it wriggle. It's a new thing Tari's trying, this whole foam art thing. She said that this one was supposed to look like the face of "Pikachu," but all Tommy can see is this weird mouse thing. Then again, he doesn't know what the fuck "Pikachu" is, and Tari's beginner skills aren't helping the image.

Izuku sits in front of him, munching on some sort of pastry while scrolling on his phone with his other hand. Tari's Coffee's become like a breakfast house or a second home to him, at this point. (At least, Tommy thinks so. Tari mentioned Izuku's his other earliest customer, so.) They've come here to simply chill, calm down from all the drama and shit, nothing special.

"What was the meeting about, anyway?" Izuku asks, looking up from his phone's screen to stare at Tommy. The blond blinks, eyebrows soon scrunching in thought. Is he allowed to tell him this shit?

Oh, fuck that! Is Tommy really fucking thinking about *sticking to invisible rules*, of all things? What has he become?!

Tommy stops nudging the "Pikachu" with his spoon, his hand poised in the air. "Uh," he so eloquently begins, his voice low, "just... stuff about what to do with Mid. And more school shit. Apparently hero internships are coming up or some shit, so I'm gonna be with the Support Course until that's over."

Izuku's eyes widen. "The Support Course?"

"Yeah." Tommy leans back, setting the spoon down and moving his hands to cushion his head against his seat's headrest. He sighs. "1-B's included in the whole internships thing. Might be able to craft shit with this wo—*whole* deal." Close call.

If Izuku noticed the slip-up, he doesn't show it. "...You *will* be back with m—C-Class 1-A when that's all done, though, right?"

"I think so. Probably."

Izuku nods, eyes flicking back to his phone from where his thumb had been subconsciously scrolling

He stops, his brows furrowing. Tommy's eye locks onto his thumb, where it seems to be scrolling the page he's on back up. It stops, too, and Tommy glances at Izuku's face just in time to see it go from confusion to absolute fucking horror. (He fucking *hates* it, feels it sear his skin like a vorpal blade to his chest or an explosion in a desolate plain. He doesn't want to see anything like it again on any of his students' faces, not after the fucking Sports Festival.)

Tommy leans back forward. "Oi," he calls out quietly. "The fuck's up wi—"

"I-Ingenium was attacked...?" Izuku's voice comes out quiet, shaken, and disbelieving, warbling as if holding back his sheer fear or tears. His thumb does something, and the light reflected on Izuku's face flashes for a moment—maybe refreshing the page? Regardless, Izuku's eyes only grow wider.

His thumb presumably taps on something, and at this point, Tommy's growing antsy. He wrings his fingers in the sleeves of his undershirt, resisting the urge to fucking—he doesn't know, snatch Izuku's phone or something? Instead of anything like that, Tommy takes a breath in, exhaling and redirecting his focus.

Ingenium. Ingenium... Where has he heard that name before? Oh, somewhere during one of Izuku's winding hero rants for sure, but what was his Quirk...?

Tari bounces over to them as Tommy frowns contemplatively, a downturn of her lips on her own face. "You good?" She asks, looking at Izuku. "You're lookin' kinda... murky." When he doesn't respond, still staring at his phone, Tari leans over to let her eyes flit over whatever he's looking at.

"Oh," she quietly breathes, her lips now permanently parted. "*Shit*; not another one..."

Tommy literally cannot take this shit anymore. He gets up and around, easily able to peer over Izuku and Tari's shoulders with his massive height.

—ero: Ingenium, also known as Iida Tensei, faced the Hero Killer: Stain barely a couple days ago. Of course, as the No. 16 Hero of Japan, everyone had high hopes he'd prevail; yet, as of the present, that is unfortunately not the case. After a harsh battle between him and Stain, Ingenium has been critically wounded, now the 24th victim of the Hero Killer.

Currently, Ingenium is in recovery, and—

Oh. So that's where Tommy knows him from, he thinks, a sense of empty despair clouding his mind (because he's felt this far too many times, he might be getting sensitized to it, and Tommy doesn't know what's worse: this hopelessness, or forgetting how to feel it.)

That's Iida's brother, someone that Izuku once mentioned Iida loved talking about more than anyone else.

Today's a not-quite Bad Day. It's enough to where Tommy feels off and wrong, but not to the point where he can't think about anything else but how shitty he is. The pouring rain's kind of fitting, in that sense. (It does suck, though, because Tommy had no umbrella and had to fucking book it to U.A. He's *still* fucking soaked.)

Idly, Tommy shuffles through everything in his inventory, organizing the armor and weapons he's made along with everything else in it. He plucks a cup of coffee Tari made specifically for Aizawa out, ignoring a curious stare or two on him. Grimacing at the several espresso shots probably inside, Tommy holds it out to Aizawa who's probably sleeping while standing.

"Thanks," Aizawa eventually mumbles, the drink taken from Tommy's hand and presumably downing half of it in one go. He hums in response, continuing to actually sort through his inventory.

Izuku and Iida enter in at one point. Tommy gives them a distracted, sluggish wave, eye only looking up to see Iida's face. Doesn't look affected despite the news coming out a few days ago; something's definitely up.

Anyway, Tommy hadn't made many weapons besides bo staffs since he does have the Axe of Peace at near-full durability, but there are a couple swords taking up a few slots in his inventory. There's also a set of diamond armor that he lines up, one that he just made yesterday. (The amount of diamonds in this world is fucking great.) He's got a few golden apples and some ambrosia on hand, too, just in case.

(The Nether is still off-limits.)

One thing that's weird about this server, Tommy remembers idly, his hand momentarily stilling, is that he hasn't found as much lapis lazuli than he'd thought. There's a surplus of diamonds an' shit, but not lapis lazuli. Eh, it wouldn't really matter much anyway; might just end up like the golden apple situation. He'd have the materials to enchant, but it wouldn't work. There's probably nothing written in Galactic here, anyway—not in Japan, at least.

Tommy's hand hovers over the whiteboards and markers mixed in there for today's thing. Midnight was supposed to handle it, but she's on leave, so Nedzu had said that Tommy could do it. Aizawa gave him all of this not long ago.

Tommy glances up when he feels the amount of stares increasing, eye locking onto Tsu's large, wide ones. He freezes, staring back for a little too long until he notices Aoyama, Hagakure, Uraraka, and Ashido looking at him, too. "What?" He scowls, his hand still poised in the air while his iffy mood sours a little.

"It's always weird when you use your Quirk," Tsu says, a finger on her lip. "Looks like you're touching nothing. How does it work, kero?"

Tommy blinks. "...I didn't tell any of you during the shopping thing?"

"Nope!" Hagakure exclaims, popping the "p." "You just said that you could carry everything for us with your Quirk, and we, of course, took advantage of that!"

"What about like, during training? You know, Cobblers 'n' the Saplings 'n' shit? Like when I build cobble walls or whatever to divide you all."

"Didn't say anything about that, either," Uraraka pipes in.

Oh. "Well," Tommy begins, eye darting down to the inventory hologram to select something random, "'s an inventory. But it's also like—uh... I can craft shit if I have materials. Like, not as in build-everything-from-scratch, but if I have parts, I can put that shit together? I don't have to work for it. At least, not as much.

"And I can build shit with specific blocks. Everything's kind of blocky, by the way." Tommy pulls out a block of oak planks, tossing it in the air and capturing it a moment later. Prime, even throwing that felt sluggish and weird. "There's a bit more to it all, but I don't think it's important." Well, it might if one of the Quirks of the people who knocked him out as a vigilante reappeared. But eh, he'll deal with it when the time comes.

"Oooh!" Snapping her fingers, Ashido points at him with a smile. "Like a sandbox game!"

...What? "A... sandbox game?"

"A type of video game, kero," Tsu answers. "Do you not know them?"

Tommy tilts his head at them quizzically. "There's fucking video games around building shit?!"

Kaminari, who's currently standing across the damn classroom, suddenly whips his head over in their direction. "Wh—you haven't heard of sandbox games?!" He practically shouts, soon quickly apologizing in a lower voice while Tommy stifles a flinch. But, he still moves over to them, a determined glint in his eye. "They aren't usually my type of game, but! There are a lot of *really* good ones! Oh my god, I've *gotta* get you one—"

"Quiet down," Aizawa orders, voice piercing through the idle chatter in the room. Kaminari shuts up, shuffling back to his seat like everyone else who was standing around, but he mouths "wait for tomorrow" at him. Tommy only nods, leaving his inventory open while looking at the underground hero.

"We're having a special hero informatics class today," Aizawa begins. Nervous, tense anticipation flashes on most of the students' faces, and if it weren't an almost-Bad Day, Tommy would've barked out a laugh. "...Code names. You'll be coming up with hero names today."

As soon as all of that sinks in, mostly everyone cheers, fists in the air and grins on their faces. Tommy can't help the small smile on his face as Aizawa demands for them to be quiet again with a flare of his Quirk, their pure excitement infectious.

Deactivating his Quirk, Aizawa continues: "This is related to the pro hero draft picks I mentioned the other day. The drafts begin in earnest in the second and third years, after students have gained experience and can become immediate assets to the pros.

"In other words, for them to extend offers to first years like you shows that they are interested in your future potential. These offers are often cancelled if that interest dies down by graduation."

"Adults are so selfish..." Mineta mutters, smacking his fist lightly on the table. It goes ignored.

"So we'll have to prove ourselves once we get picked, huh?" Hagakure questions rhetorically, leaning forward in interest. Aizawa nods.

Turning towards the chalkboard behind him, the underground hero raises a tiny pale remote in his palm. "Here are the totals for those with offers," he says, clicking something on the device. Soon, projected on the green board are bars with names on one side, the bars in different lengths. Tommy looks at them curiously like the rest of the students; he hadn't been able to see any of these.

Todoroki with—holy shit—four-thousand-something, Bakugo with three-thousand, Iida with a thousand, Tokoyami with three-hundred... Tommy resists the urge to blow his lips, eyes scanning the

entire list. Izuku's got half a hundred offers or so, which is ridiculously low for someone as tactful as him, but it's... something.

"Keeping these results in mind," Aizawa speaks, "whether or not anyone asked for you, you all will be participating in internships with the pros."

Most of the students look surprised. When Aizawa's gaze presumably gets to Izuku's unsurprised-yet-excited face, he glances at Tommy with a slight glare. Well, he has no damn proof Tommy did anything, so it doesn't count. Tommy looks away and quietly attempts to whistle (and half-succeeds) anyway.

The teacher sighs. "At the USJ, though unintended, you already got to experience combat with real villains. Adding the weapon and hand-to-hand combat training we do, and some of you may think you're ready to face the world just like you did then." His expression turns serious, his brows furrowing as his gaze goes across the room and onto every student. "I will tell you right now: that is not enough. It would still be best for you to see how pro heroes work firsthand."

Sato does a low fist-pump. "So that explains the hero names!"

Following him up, Uraraka smiles cheerily, doing a supposed ready pose. "Things are suddenly getting a lot more fun!"

"Well, those hero names are still temporary," Aizawa counters, "but if you're not serious about it..."

Tommy huffs, taking out three whiteboards from his inventory and fanning them out single-handedly. "You'll prolly have hell to pay later. Oi, catch 'n' pass 'em back."

He casually tosses five whiteboards to the students in the front row, snickering lightly as he watches them fumble with the items. "Think it's 'cause a lot of the hero names students use are gonna be recognized by society," Tommy theorizes, counting the split stacks of markers in his inventory. Five people per column... so five markers each. When the boards are diffused, he throws the markers to the front row, too. "If you stick to the name you started with for a long while, it's gonna be too late to change it, especially when you get to be pros."

"You're right," Aizawa confirms, watching Tommy with faux exasperation. "Regardless, the two of us will be making sure your names are alright."

"Eh?" Jirou pipes up, her ear-jacks subconsciously moving with her surprise. "Wait—but Tommy isn't a hero, I think, and if he is he doesn't have a hero name. Teacher... your hero name's *Eraserhead*."

"Hey! I'm great at naming shit!" Tommy protests, his face falling into something more solemn. "And uh. Yeah, maybe there should be an actual hero here, but..."

"Midnight was supposed to be here," Aizawa finishes. The atmosphere changes immediately, thickening to the point where Tommy could cut it with a knife. Every student is tense, their eyes away from the front of the class.

He clears his throat loudly, garnering the attention of the class once more. "Anyway," Tommy says, not-at-all subtly changing the topic, "it'll be more like me doing all of this shit. Aizawa needs a fucking coma; bet the caffeine's already drained from his system or some shit."

The underground hero nods in complete agreement, already pulling up his signature yellow sleeping bag. "When you come up with a hero name," he starts, "you get a more concrete vision of what you

want to be like in the future, and you can get closer to it. This is what it means when people say: 'names and natures do often agree.' Like 'All Might,' for example."

(Izuku flinches. Tommy prays to fucking Prime Aizawa doesn't notice it. With his skills, he probably did.)

"Make sure no one burns the classroom down," he advises, burrowing into his sleeping bag. Tommy gives him a look that screams no promises.

And then the man's fucking passed out. Tommy sighs. "Uncap your markers and get thinking. Play some music if that helps, but use headphones 'n' don't play that shit too loudly."

Tommy glances at the students' desks again. Looks like mostly everyone's done writing. He can't really see those in the back, but their shoulders aren't shifting, so that's gotta mean something. His eye locking onto movement in his peripheral vision, Tommy turns his head a little to check on Aizawa who's still sleeping away.

He internally shakes his head. "Right," he exclaims, clapping once. That won't wake Aizawa up, he knows it. "Let's get this shitshow started! Uh... Think most of you are done. So! These'll be presented—Prime, do *not* give me those fucking looks, these are your *hero names*. Hero. Names. Public shit. Get used to it now or when the public uses them."

...Shit, that's gotta be a little mean. Tommy sighs agitatedly, setting a hand over his eyes momentarily. "Sorry," he mumbles. "Today's shit. Uh... Start from row one—yeah, this row here with Aoyama. You ready?"

"Oui!" Aoyama answers, sparkling as always. Tommy almost cringes; he can't handle this shit right now. He still beckons for the student to get up on the little podium or whatever in the front of the class, shifting away to let Aoyama present his board.

With a flourish, Aoyama raises it high into the air. In accented English, he announces: "The Sparkling Hero: I Cannot Stop Twinkling!"

...Well then.

"Nope," Tommy says in an instant, watching Aoyama's face fall with slight remorse. "Good English, but that's way too fucking long. What, do you want every single person to say, 'Oh, this is the Sparkling Hero: I Cannot Stop Twinkling?' My guy, that's six fuckin' words, *plus* it comes off as a little egoistical. I think."

Damn. He looks absolutely heart-broken. Tommy grumbles, contemplatively putting a hand over his mouth with the junction of his thumb and index finger under his nose.

Aoyama's... French, right? Phil told him about that once. Said it was a part of the "Romance Branch" in languages or whatever... Tommy summed it up as it being more classy than English, like sounding like someone spoke in cursive. That fits Aoyama's whole... shining thing, so—

"If there's a word," Tommy slowly begins, "that can sum all that shit up into one in French, then can you use that instead?" His eye flits up to Aoyama, who's looking at his board, of which he now lowered, thoughtfully. "...You do speak French, right?"

"I do..." Aoyama absentmindedly answers, tapping the edge of his marker against the whiteboard in a steady beat. "Hm..." Suddenly snapping into alertness, Aoyama whips his head towards Tommy with a glint in his eyes. "What about Magnifique?"

Tommy grins. He tries to make it look less strained than it feels. "That's more fuckin' like it! The Sparkling Hero: Magnifique! Sounds leagues better."

Aoyama practically preens. "Merci beaucoup, monsieur," he says, doing a little bow his way before moving back to his desk.

Ashido wastes no time in bounding up to the podium next. "My turn!" She exclaims, setting her board face-forward excitedly. "Hero name: Alien Queen!"

Tommy thinks about it for a moment, cocking his head to the side subconsciously. He does think of creatures in space when he thinks of aliens, but... Alien Queen does sound badass in some cases? And a little friendly? Maybe?

"I'd say it's good," he ends up deciding. Ashido breaks out into a smile, nodding before bounding back to her seat with the same giddy grin.

The next couple names don't really need changes—at least, that's what Tommy thinks. Froppy sounds friendly, which is probably what Tsu was going for, and Red Riot is *way* fucking cooler than Crimson Riot.

Jirou goes up next after teasing Kaminari about having no hero name yet, setting hers up in front of everyone. "Hearing Heroine: Earphone Jack." She announces with a little smile.

Tommy, on the other hand, frowns. "Sounds a little plain," he bluntly states. "Like, is that all there would be to you? Just—Earphone Jack? Froppy sounds fun, Red Riot is cool, and Magnifique is classy... I don't know, it sounds a little off."

Though she does look a little dejected, Jirou nods to him. "I'll keep that in mind," she notes, heading back to her seat.

There really isn't anything Tommy can change with Tentacole. Suggesting Kraken would be a little villainous, and Tommy can't really think of a good synonym for tentacle, of all things, so Tentacole has to do. Cellophane sounds cool, so that's fine. But Tommy *cannot* fucking handle "Tailman" without busting a gut in laughter even though today's a little wrong.

"The Martial Arts Hero part is fine!" Tommy exclaims, attempting to stifle chuckles as he thinks about "*Tailman*." "Just—the name itself isn't. Like for Jirou, is that all you'll be? Tailman? That's *very* fucking lame. Go with—uh, I don't know—Whiplash, instead. 'Cause your tail's like a whip 'n' all. Could be like despite your appearance or something, you pack a punch."

Ojiro pauses, seriously debating that for a bit, before nodding. "Sure," he agrees, "I can go with Whiplash. The Martial Arts Hero: Whiplash..." He nods again. "I can do that. Though, what was that about my appearance?"

Tommy blinks, coughs pointedly, and then shoos Ojiro away.

"Sweets Hero: Sugarman!"

Tommy purses his lips. "That makes you sound like you hand out sweets to children instead of an actual hero," he states without hesitation, looking away from Sato's rejected expression. "Do something else, man. Like, you consume sugar, so maybe name yourself after one? I don't actually know the names of other sugars, but please, for the love of Prime, change that."

After a moment, Sato stands straighter, heading back to his desk with an air of determination.

Kaminari's has a surprising amount of thought into it. The only thing Tommy says to it is "Chargebolt's badass as hell, dude," because it really, truly is. Now—

"Stealth Heroine: Invisible Girl!"

—on the other hand...

"Stop doing that!" Tommy huffs, pinching the bridge of his nose. He reels his hand away as if it burned him, because holy shit he did not just do the thing old people and underground heroes (i.e. Aizawa) do. He scowls lightly, erasing it entirely when he looks at Hagakure. "Stop just—putting your Quirk names down an' shit! Invisible Girl is just who you are, not what you'll be in the future! Go think of something else!"

Hagakure pouts, he knows she does. "Yes sir," she drawls playfully and jokingly, slipping back to her desk with a silent sigh.

Jirou goes back up again, this time saying: "The Pulse Heroine: Amped-Up. Amped for short."

Tommy considers it for a moment, and then for a little longer, before finally nodding with finality. "That's alright," he declares, and Jirou goes back to her seat with a relieved sigh.

Creaiti's good in his opinion, so Tommy let that be. Todoroki just chose... Shoto, his first name... and Tommy doubts he's gonna be able to make him change that any time soon, so he tried to pog through the pain even when it came out as a sigh and a "next, please."

Though...! "Tsukuyomi sounds epic!" Tommy gushes, shooting Tokoyami a grin. He looks away, but Dark Shadow pops out under his shirt. It gives Tommy a wide bird-equivalent of a grin and a thumbs up, so he must've taken the compliment way better than Tommy thought. Tommy gives Dark Shadow a thumbs-up of his own, looking away when Tokoyami looks at him questioningly.

"How about the Sugar Hero: Captain Novolin!" Sato reveals excitedly.

Tommy pogs for a moment. "Oh, that's so much better!" He exclaims. "Fuck yeah!" Sato puffs his chest out proudly as he goes back to his desk.

"Fresh-Picked Hero: Grape Juice!"

"Okay, that's fine, just go sit down already."

Hagakure grins as she sets her board down. "The Unseen Heroine: Ultraviolet!"

"That's good, too!" ...The fuck's ultraviolet, anyway?

Koda's hero name, the Petting Hero: Anima, mostly fit with his shy nature, so Tommy was fine with it. But then...

Bakugo fucking crashes the side of his whiteboard down. Tommy hides his flinch the best he can, preparing for something wild. Like, he doesn't know, "King Explosion Murder." Bakugo certainly seems the type to do that.

Instead, though, his board says "Ground Zero."

In Tommy's peripheral vision, Izuku sits straighter, his usual wide-eyed stare pinned on Bakugo. His tormentor gives him no mind, however, instead repeating what's on his board with significantly more ferocity than his handwriting, which is already chaotic enough.

...Tommy has no fucking clue what Ground Zero is, but it certainly sounds better than King Explosion Murder, so he'll fucking take it.

He nods in Bakugo's direction when he looks at him (but not in the eyes; never in *his* eyes.) "That's fine," he reluctantly chooses, and Bakugo stomps back to his desk.

Tommy pauses for a moment, covering his mouth with his hand as he yawns. Prime, how long has this gone on for? He feels drained. Uravity's cute as a hero name, so Tommy decided Uraraka can keep that. Now that her's is done...

"Who else is left?" He questions, glancing over them all.

Momo raises her hand. "I believe that it's just Iida and Midoriya, Tommy," she states. Thank Prime she exists.

"Right, yeah." Then, more to himself, he mumbles, "Two more 'n' then it's my turn to sleep." Tommy glances at Iida absentmindedly, suddenly a little more alert when he sees the dullness in his eyes. Oh, something's fucking *up*.

And yet, when Iida gets up to the podium, all he's put down is his first name, too. (His hand is shaking.)

Tommy lets Iida use his first name, watching him wearily the entire time.

Finally, it's Izuku's turn. Tommy exhales, slumping momentarily as if he can sleep standing up, before straightening back up again with a grunt. "Kay, Big Man," he starts. "Your turn." Izuku himself takes a deep breath, going up to the podium and setting his board down.

"T-The Unyielding Hero: Deku," he reveals, his gaze and posture resolute. Tommy recoils back as if Izuku fucking burned him, because it does literally feel like that. What the fuck, what the *fuck*—wasn't that the name that Bakugo used on him for an entire fucking decade to mock him?!

"Izuku," Tommy says, and oh thank Prime none of the other students truly understand the depths of this despite the shock on their faces and their own protests, "in the most kindest way possible, what

the actual *shit*."

Izuku laughs a little sheepishly and a little self-depreciatingly as he turns to him. (Tommy takes the quickest glance behind Izuku to see Bakugo's reaction. He's... awfully blank.) "Can I explain first?" He asks, and Tommy nods with fervor, because what the *fuck* is going on in his mind right now.

"Well, originally I was going to go with Valor as my h-hero name. Everyone can tell that Deku means, uh... something bad based on the characters alone, after all, but..." Izuku turns back to the general class, his fingers fiddling with the edges of his board. "I... I've been called this for far too long. And, well... um... I'd like to change the meaning of it. I don't want this to hang on me forever as a mocking nickname, I want to look at this ugly, visceral, disgusting thing and be—uh... P-Proud of it?"

Izuku nods to himself. "Yeah. I think that's what I want. I want to look at this with pride. This is a part of me, just like the scars I bear and all my imperfections. I want to accept that..." He trails off, a blush rising on his cheeks. "B-But, um, a-anyway! Please only use this during hero work for now. If a-any of you were to call me Deku outside of today or heroics, I'd probably c-cry and spiral. If you're still hesitant about calling me D-Deku, then please use Valor. So. Y-Yeah! That's it."

Izuku moves as if he were to go back to his seat but freezes mid-step, soon moving back to look at Tommy expectantly. He's still in a state of shock, so it takes him a moment to make a rational sentence. Even that's jumbled up.

"I—well—sure?" Tommy purses his lips tightly, picking at his bandages. "I won't stop you from using that, of all things. But... you'll get called that a lot, you know."

Izuku smiles. "I do."

"If you don't change that shit early, you'll, you know... Have that with you for your entire career."

"I know."

"You'll relive those times."

"I-I know."

Tommy huffs loudly, then, leaning back on the classroom wall with crossed arms and a fond, strained smile. "You're true to your little title, then; unrelenting. Alright, you can use that shit. Just tell people when you don't want to, alright?"

Izuku smirks victoriously, that soon lowering into an offended gape at the end. "Excuse you! I have enough backbone now to know that last bit instinctively!"

"Do you? Do you *really*?"

"Oh, shut up!" Izuku laughs, moving back to his desk. Tommy feels the day get a little bit lighter on his shoulders, a smile easier to bring to his lips. He gets off the wall, and seeing that most of the attention's on him anyway, he does a little beckoning motion. "Markers, boards," he demands.

...Tommy pauses. "Keep the markers, actually," he says with an impish grin, "and those who don't have some, come get one from me. We're going to make Aizawa the prettiest man around."

Shouta wakes up to something on his cheek and giggles all around him. His eyes flare open immediately, his Quirk thrumming through them. Yet his vision's blurry, and he can't see much past

shades of skin and blurs of black until it's too late to tell who was who's since everyone around him has retreated.

With a heavy sigh (God, he's *still* tired) Shouta gets into a sitting position in his sleeping bag. He unzips the thing, mumbling with a gruff voice, "I assume that all the names are done, Tommy?"

"Y-Yep!" The blond presumably replies. Shouta rubs his eyes with a frown, soon looking up at Tommy who... has Shouta's phone in his hand with the camera towards him. "Everything's A-Okay here! Nothing to worry about! Nothing was burnt down! We got *alllll* the hero names!"

Shouta narrows his eyes. "...What are you doing." His frown deepens when he looks around and sees mostly everyone looking at him with grins. "What did anyone here do."

Tommy is still smiling at Shouta's phone. "Nothing, nothing! Nothing deadly, at least!"

And then, a camera shutter goes off. Tommy's face immediately turns into one of despair, and then he's frantically doing something on it. Shouta sets a single hand on his capture weapon, a tendril of fabric yanking his phone over even when Tommy yelps and then darts away.

TEACHER'S CHATROOM

11:46

<coffee is my blood> [aizsawafcedokdl,es.img]

<coffee is my blood> TMMY HERE DONT AHVE TIMETHIANK CLASS A

<MEGAPHONE> THANK YOU LITTLE LISTENER! I'VE SAVED THIS THREE TIMES, DON'T WORRY!! YOUR SACRIFICE IS APPRECIATED

...Oh. Shouta feels his Quirk flare up instinctively, a countdown already in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

1. so i finally gathered the motivation to look back into old chapters and change how koda's intro went 'cause of jsl n stuff. if you look back into like,,, new page or so, koda will introduce themself as "peony" to represent themself, and then spell out their name and all (with letters and not characters but shhh that's for convenience.) 's the reason why tommy's briefly called "gladiolus" in this chap, too; gladiolus is what koda will call tommy instead of signing t-o-m-m-y and stuff. [\[return to text\]](#)

uhh since i can't look back w/o suffering from severe second-hand embarrassment, can yall let me know if koda ever fingerspells his name or tommy's before the new intro he does? that'd be appreciated ,, ,

and the hero names !!!!! uhhh, i didn't like some of the canon ones, so i searched up some new ones !! hopefully they're good? aha, ,, (SHHH IGNORE THAT IT'S OOC FOR TOMMY TO HAVE A NAMING SENSE AIGHT,,)

here's where i mostly got them from:

<https://quirkwizard.tumblr.com/post/651749504069058560/got-any-better-hero-names-for-mezo-fumikage>

<https://www.tumblr.com/misty-defender/652185496363139072/class-1a-better-hero-names>

also !! if any reasoning didn't make sense during the meeting, just think of it as like weird fanfic bullshit aight? /hj

ALSO IGNORE THAT IZU FINDS OUT ABT INGENIUM EARLIER THAN CANON.

SHHHH. i can and will use canon divergence to bend everything to my will /lh

scrap metal

Chapter Notes

double update nov 16 special (in EST, at least)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy grimaces as he digs his thumb into his face and drags it along his skin, the pained look worsening when it comes back almost entirely stained black. He lowers his hand and rubs the inky part with his index finger, watching the latter turn a dark ashy gray. "Didn't have to fuckin' smear marker all over my face," Tommy grumbles. (Aizawa had looked like he wanted to hit him at first.)^[1] "You've made mine worse than yours! It wasn't even bad in the first place!"

Aizawa scowls, showing Tommy the screen of his phone and pointing to the picture on it as if Tommy doesn't know the masterpiece he'd painted on the underground hero's face. "'Wasn't even bad,' huh?" He mocks, and without a single glance at his phone, zooms in on the blatant dick that Tommy most-definitely drew on his forehead. The fact that Aizawa's now using his other hand to rub some of the marks off using a wipe Momo gave him makes this even better. (There's a certain mirth to his eyes; Tommy relaxes.)

Tommy cracks a grin. "Just hide it with your mop of hair," he suggests, dramatically cowering when Aizawa crushes the cleaning wipe in his hand. "Okay, okay! I'll help you convince Mic to delete the photo."

Aizawa grumbles incoherently, casually tossing the cleaning wipe into a nearby trash-bin. There's still a few smudges of translucent black on his face, so Tommy counts that as a win until he notices and wipes them off, too.

"Monsieur," Aoyama calls out, holding out the same type of wipe Momo gave Aizawa. "Here." Tommy glances up; Momo gives him a small smile. He gives a slightly bigger one back in thanks, wiping his face while subtly taking his communicator out.

9:26

< **big man** > whispers to < **MEGAPHONE** >: Hey

< **big man** > whispers to < **MEGAPHONE** >: Hey cuckatoo

"Now that everyone's decided on their hero names," Aizawa begins to drawl, "we'll go back to talking about the internships."

< **MEGAPHONE** > whispers to < **big man** >: Please don't call me that, I'm begging you. /lh

< **big man** > whispers to < **MEGAPHONE** >: Sheesh alright

< **big man** > whispers to < **MEGAPHONE** >: Nyway, you have the pic right

< **MEGAPHONE** > whispers to < **big man** >: I DO!! YOU NEED IT?

Aizawa takes a stack of papers out, raising them vertically and lightly tapping the bottom on the little podium he stands at. "These will last a week. As for where they'll take place, those who had offers will have their own lists to choose from."

< **big man** > *whispers to* < **MEGAPHONE** >: *Yeah kinda*

<**big man**> *whispers to* <**MEGAPHONE**>: *Told Eraser Id go and 'convince' you to dlete it*

<**big man**> *whispers to* <**MEGAPHONE**>: *delete**

< **big man** > *whispers to* < **MEGAPHONE** >: *Send it ere so that when you ddo that I can send it back*

"Those who don't will choose from among forty agencies around the country that are willing to accept our interns."

< **big man** > *whispers to* < **MEGAPHONE** >: *Tell everyoone else to save it for blackmail*

< **big man** > *whispers to* < **MEGAPHONE** >: *Worse case scenario*

< **big man** > *whispers to* < **MEGAPHONE** >: *Print an frame it*

"They all work in different places and have different specialties. For example, Thirteen would prioritize rescues from accidents and disasters more than fighting villains. Think carefully before you choose."

< **MEGAPHONE** > *whispers to* < **big man** >: *GREAT IDEAS, LITTLE LISTENER!! I'LL GET ONTO IT RIGHT NOW > : -)*

Tommy smirks, looking away from that little smile (and his minutely shaking hands) just in time to see Aizawa start dividing the papers. Like he could sense Tommy was done with something, the man turns to him when Tommy looks at him, raising an eyebrow. The blond huffs, coming over to him and separating the stapled paper packets as Aizawa begins passing them out.

...Sheesh, this one's fucking *packed*. Tommy holds a whole ass slab of papers stapled into separate parts and tied together with a strip of something transparent around it. On the top is a sticky note that simply reads **TODOROKI SHOTO**. There's another one like it, this one reading: **BAKUGO KATSUKI**. Tommy's hand is already flicking through the corners of pages, lifting some up higher to read a hero's name or two if he can, but Aizawa clears his throat expectantly in front of him (what the shit, when did he get there), and Tommy gives him the rest of the papers with a grumble.

The general chatter in the classroom turns into declarations of where everyone wishes to work, as well as small debates on what would be best for them and others. It dies down quickly when the bell rings, though, signaling the end of the class period. "Turn in your choices in a couple days," Aizawa tells his class, already strolling out the door with his sleeping bag over his shoulder.

"Wait—we've only got two days?!" Someone shouts, panic laced in their voice, but Aizawa keeps moving.

"Due to changes, the hand-to-hand and weaponry training will be reduced to Tuesday and Friday again," the underground hero adds, moving to close the door after turning around one last time to say: "Make your decisions efficiently. Dismissed."

And then he closes it, leaving the class—and Tommy—to think.

Ashido gapes at the door before her head whips towards Tommy, a beaming smile stretched out on her face. "Are we really not doing training today?!"

"Yeah," Tommy answers, a weird sense of restlessness and something being wrong going through his mind. It isn't serious, so this is just from the new schedule thing. "We aren't. Back to, uh, what was it—Tuesdays an' Thursdays for you all."

The class cheers loudly, some almost throwing their papers into the air, but Tommy still thinks about it. Usually, every fourth period in a school day would be used to train—at least, ever since Tommy joined. If not to train, then to study their Quirks or some shit, try and figure out ways to use them better even if it bore no fruit. Tommy's used to that, used to moving all the time, so he adapted to it easily. It's why Pandora's Vault made him reckless.

Eh... He can't go back to his house and continue mining because Tommy has to stay here or some shit. He's a "Teacher's Assistant," so he usually just gets messaged by Aizawa or Yamada or whoever if they need help in a class, and then he goes there an' does whatever. (The students don't really move from classes; the teachers do.)^[2] That was primarily an excuse to get Tommy into U.A.'s system, though, so a majority of the time, no one messages him and he stays with Class 1-A as damage control or something. Tommy doesn't really know anyone besides Aizawa, Yamada, and Midnight, either, since they just need his name for him to help, and they're all busy, so none of them can spar with Tommy.

That fourth period of practically nothing is going to make him agitated until tomorrow.

Maybe he'll find a beach like Takoda or some shit. If there was that much trash on it, there's gotta be another shore like that. Or maybe he could use the gyms? There might be students there...

Tommy huffs, crossing his arms and leaning against the wall as the hero with the black skinsuit walks in, here to teach *mathematics* and all that boring shit. He'll figure it out later.

While the class stayed at the cafeteria for lunch, Tommy finds himself eating only a bowl of rice and then leaving, moving through slightly unfamiliar halls. Izuku had given him a worried look, but Tommy had waved it off with a hand. He wasn't gonna destroy shit or whatever; just exploring. Well, finding something, really.

More specifically—

When Tommy approaches a tall, imposing metal door very fucking different from all the others, he hears a very, very loud explosion on the other side. It vibrates his body through the floor; Tommy would've staggered back even if it didn't feel like there was a mini-earthquake shaking the building. He repeats that *this is not L'Manburg, this is not L'Manburg, this is not L'Manburg*, until he can stop grabbing at his hair and stop smelling smoke and ash and stop seeing explosions behind his eyelid and *stop*. Being. *Pathetic*.

—the Support Department. Tommy's gonna be there for like a week at least, so he might as well see what rules they have.

With a shaky breath, Tommy stands straight from where he had subconsciously hunched over himself. He lets his hand card through his hair again, and again, and again, and maybe one last time before he gathers the strength to reapproach the metal door. A little bit of smoke seeps out from under the door (Tommy holds his breath), and even from outside he can hear people coughing inside.

Their reprimands aren't... panicked, though. Just exasperated. And tired. Tommy thinks he can hear the voice of the guy with gear on his head.

Tommy grabs an embedded handle in the door, but when he moves to pull it, hesitation holds him back. Because, well—the fuck're they doing in there that involves explosions? Does Tommy really want to deal with flashbacks like every second? As if to remind him, the smoke coming from under the door wafts to his nose; his quivering fingers falter, threatening to slip and let go, and Tommy almost lets them.

No. No—the fuck's he *doing*? He's Tommy Innit "Thes"—*Tommy Innit*, and Tommy Innit does *not* give in to—to silly little fires and weapons and words as sharp as sewing needles and, and something as ugly and dense and small as smoke. Tommy Innit survived wars, Tommy Innit survived *exile*—Tommy Innit can *certainly* survive a few little booms.

Throwing his hesitance away, Tommy grabs the handle and flings the door open, immediately letting go to cover his nose. He uses his other hand to begin waving away all the smolder, his eye squinting as it tries to see through the smog. Just in case, he keeps his inventory open.

"*For god's sake*, Hatsume," the teacher with the gear shouts (at least, Tommy thinks they do), "stop putting random sh—*tuff* together!" That same voice dissolves into a minor coughing fit, soon adding: "Go eat lu—" a cough, "—nch!"

Another person with a more feminine voice begins to laugh merrily, even if that's peppered with coughs. "Why do that," they ask, wheezing again, "when I can keep making babies?"

Woah. *Okay*, Tommy thinks, spinning on his heel and turning the fuck around. He is not dealing with this.

Unfortunately, the smoke's cleared up enough to where the person with the feminine voice exclaims, "Wait! Oh, you're *new*—haven't seen you before! Or maybe I did at the Festival; I," they drag the letter out, "don't remember!"

Tommy whirls around, wanting to see the face of who's talking to him—and flinches when there's already a head of pink, bright hair in front of him.

The person's hair has thick dreadlocks; not like Tari's in the way that they seem to pull her scalp apart, but looser, more wild. There's a set of goggles on their head, revealing their bright yellow eyes that have weird pupils; they're shaped like if Tommy were looking at the tip of a four-pointed arrowhead, but empty in the middle. They have baggy pants, gloves, and a thick-strap shirt, all of which are in gray shades. There's a toolbelt around their waist and grime around their eyes.

Oh. His mind finally connects her to the girl in the Sports Festival. This is Hatsume, the same person he'd wanted a jetpack out of. (Standing here before him, she reminds Tommy of Tubbo so fucking much it hurts.)

"I'm Hastume Mei," she states, her mouth curling into an impish grin. "I use she and her. Pleasure meeting you...?"

It takes Tommy too long to find his voice while he's hearing Tubbo's pleas all over again. "T-Tommy Innit," he manages at some point, stepping back from there. "Or Innit Tommy. However the fuck the naming system works. Uh—call me Tommy, it's easier. Nice meeting you too?" Hastily, he tacks on, "I use he and him."

Prime, he shouldn't have come here. He should've just fucking *left*. He should've joined the class to have lunch and saved this for another day.

Hatsume grins wider, backing up a little. Even so, her body buzzes with energy and excitement. "Ooooh, are you here to see some of my babies? Hm—you don't seem like a student, so maybe you need some *hero* hero support gear?" If she took a step, she'd have probably been able to pull an Izuku and start bouncing all over the walls an' shit. "This is so! *Exciting!* I've never worked on a *real* hero's gear before; judging by your body type, you can't really do with heavy stuff, right? You'll need something light and strong, but luckily enough, I've probably made a baby or two based off of—"

"Oi, Hatsume," her teacher calls out, effectively shutting her up. Hatsume turns to look at them with a hum, unaffected by their annoyed frown, or even the slightly solemn, stern tone in their next words. "Give him more space."

Hatsume's smile doesn't diminish, but she does mimic a pout the best she can. Then, she moves back a few more steps. "Didn't need to tell me that! Even *I* can tell he's jumpier than me!"

Despite the tremor that he's desperately trying to hide in his voice right now, Tommy scoffs. "The fuck's *that* supposed to mean?" He questions.

"None ya!" Hatsume's head whips back towards him, her dreadlocks flaring behind her. It makes Tommy flinch, though he does try to hide it the best he can. She doesn't seem to notice as she claps her hands gleefully, reaching out for his hand before retracting hers and instead moving further into the room. She pierces through the remaining smoke on the ground with her quick movements, gesturing for Tommy to move closer with a hand. "C'mon, c'mon! I have so many babies to show you!"

Her teacher sighs. "Ignore her if you want," they say, approaching Tommy slowly. Streaks of light brown hair peek out from under their helm (which looks more and more like a yellow simplified Ender Dragon's head the more he stares at it.) "Don't think I've introduced myself; I'm Power Loader—or Maijima. He and him. What're you here for?"

Tommy shifts on his feet, taking a moment to glance around the room. There's metal tables sporting lots of fancy machinery and shit, colorful wires and sheets of metal all over the place. Equally, tools are littered all over the place, some of them sorted in toolboxes on the ground and others alone on the tables. The walls, a light steel gray like the rest of the school, are splattered with ash and shrapnel. Besides Tommy, Maijima, and Hatsume, no one else seems to be in the room. Thank Prime for that; with more people, it'd be smaller and more cluttered. Or maybe it wouldn't; there's a sort of corridor that leads to somewhere else.

Tommy takes a breath, tugging at his sleeve. "Uh," he eloquently begins, staring at something random behind the teacher, "just wanted to see what's up. 'M gonna be here for, y'know, the whole internships thing, so. Yeah."

Maijima hums in understanding, backing away. He opens his mouth to probably say something, but Hatsume's voice interrupts him. "Oh my god," she basically squeals, darting from her desk back to Tommy, "you're staying here for a while?! Oh, now I *have* to introduce you to my babies!"

Maijima sighs. "Hatsume—"

His student makes little jumps, switching the foot she lands on every time. "Pfft, it should be *fine!*" She protests cheerfully. "It's lunch time! We have like, what, an hour? I'm not letting that go to waste, not for me or for Tommy!"

"What if I just wanted to check this place out?" Tommy asks before he can stop himself, crossing his arms. "Need to go back eventually, y'know?"

Hatsume tilts her head as if Tommy's asked the most ridiculous question in the world. "Then why'd you come here during lunch? You'd have spent it with your class and then come here after school, right?" She points a gloved finger to him. "You want something here, whether it be a simple field observation or an invention; I'm gonna give you at least that and *more*."

With a grin, she once again motions for Tommy to come over to her desk. Despite the plain irritation and warning plastered all over the parts of Maijima's face he can see, Tommy eventually sighs. He scrunches his face in obvious hesitation but follows Hatsume anyway. Better than being bored in his lounge, crafting all sorts of shit for preparation.

"Remember to *not* blow anything else up," Maijima finally says, sighing. Tommy shifts himself so that he can see the entire room, including when Maijima moves to the little corridor Tommy had noticed before. "If you do, I'm gonna be the one to blow up in your face instead, and so will the paperwork to pay for the damages. Understood?"

Hastume laughs. "Mhm! Loud and clear!"

Maijima's footsteps—which are a little heavy, and they drag a little—start moving out of the room. "Gonna get lunch myself," he explains. "Watch her, Tommy."

Tommy does a salute subconsciously. "Yep. Got it."

And then, with the sound of a door being left slightly ajar, Tommy's sucked into Hatsume's world.

She rambles about so many inventions, Tommy can't keep up. Every one-sided conversation jumps around to another topic like every five seconds, sometimes returning to continue other chats. It's to the point where the conversations seem to intertwine with each other in his mind, and he can barely differentiate one from the other. Somehow, they all go back to Hatsume's whole purpose of starting her rambling: Tommy's equipment he "wanted" to get. (Not that he *really* minds. Free weaponry and armor's free weaponry and armor.)

It's a bit amazing, all of the shit Hatsume's created. They're all sorts of complex things, ranging from useless to entertaining to efficient to simply experimental. Yeah, Tommy can make pickaxes and axes and swords just fine with a crafting table, but more convoluted things, like the three sets of jetpack boots Hatsume made for the Sports Festival that she's still working on? Shit like that needs more manual action and stuff, not something as quick as using a crafting table.

"These might be useful!" Hastume exclaims suddenly, plucking a sort of hexagonal disk thing off of her desk. Tommy squints at it, his mind slowly piecing together the bits of familiarity it brings to remember what the fuck it is. "They're still prototypes, and they're all a little too thin for my liking. Well, *this* form is fine, but when they expand, they're much too weak."

Tommy snaps his fingers. "Those!" He suddenly blurts out, flinching violently and lowering his volume. "The, the fuckin' uh—shield! That!"

Hatsume brightens, and it's a kindness that she doesn't comment. "Yeah! These babies really hauled ass!" Her expression dims a little, a hint of contemplation peeking through. "I've been working on them for *weeks*, but I can't ever get the right thickness down," she sighs, holding the disk to the

fluorescent light above. "Prolly gotta stop working on them, eh. I'm 'wasting materials,' as the Teach puts it."

"...You need materials?" Tommy questions, raising a brow. "Like scrap metals an' shit? Or does the type of metal matter?"

Hastume turns to him with a glint in her eyes, confusion peeking through. "The type of metal does matter in most cases," she soon answers, the sentence starting slow, "but with mini projects and stuff, I'm fine with whatever. Tanaka can like, strengthen metals and stuff, so that usually isn't a problem anyway. Why?"

Tommy opens his inventory and sets down the couple full stacks of iron he's always kept in his inventory now, wincing at the clangs some of them make when he does that too hard against the metal table. He has to move some shit to have enough space, too.

He has like a ton of diamonds he could set down instead, but iron's still a lot more common than them. Tommy can't make the same mistake he is with ambrosia and golden apples. Plus, iron's fastest of the two to smelt.

Organizing the stacks to where they're neatly presented, Tommy does a little pizzazz hands gesture, looking down to the student. She, however, is frozen, stuck staring at the bars.

"I, uh, have more metals that I don't use since I'm not a blacksmith or whatever," he tacks on. "Those're at my house though."

"Oh my god," Hastume whispers reverently, finally looking up at him. Her eyes are practically shining. "You *have* to stay here."

Tommy manages a little smirk, his form relaxing a little. Thank Prime, too, because being all tense here has begun to hurt. "I will—for a week. Gimmie like, uh... three favors or some shit? Or twenty, and *then* I'll be your metal-dealer. I'll also help you build shit even after the internships."

"What, are you roping me into some sort of scheme?" Hastume snorts. She leans back, putting her hands in her pockets while something like questioning flashes across her face. "Why twenty favors?"

"You'll see," Tommy vaguely says, his little smile able to grow into a small impish grin.

Hatsume actually laughs this time, raising a gloved hand. Tommy stares at it, and it's only when Hatsume extends it a little more when he remembers that ah, he's supposed to shake it. Which he does, and it makes Hatsume's perma-grin all the more terrifying.

"I've always liked taking risks," she offhandedly comments, giving their hands a fast, rough, and long shake. "It's a deal!"

Tommy asks for a work-in-progress machine. Nothing too big or small, just something that requires for Hatsume to just meld two pieces together to be done with it. She reluctantly provides, and when Tommy welds them together by putting them in a crafting table before presenting it to her, Hatsume pogs, the grin that follows stretching to her ears.

When Tommy demonstrates just how fast he can make tools, as well as how many he can make in one sitting (which was a bad idea, in hindsight, because they now litter the floor), she gasps and pogs even harder.

(On another couple notes, the metal desks with all the tools count as a crafting table; at least, a very, *very* dubious and glitchy one. Tommy's decided to stick with a wooden one. Also, turns out Tommy can make shit with stuff other than iron, leather, gold, and diamonds? Like with whatever the hell Damascus steel is. He isn't sure how the fuck it works now, but he and Hatsume are *rolling* with it.)

Tommy holds the amazing drawing of the elytra up, practically shoving it into Hatsume's face. She takes it with ease, pulling the paper back to see what's actually on it. She pauses, squints, moves her head back, squints again, adjusts her grip on the page, uses her free hand to follow something on it, and then finally looks up with an empty smile to ask: "What is this?"

"An elytra?" Tommy answers, a frown marring his face. "I told you, they're a bit of a myth 'n' all from where I'm from. Only a few people have seen it, let alone used one. But those who did—"

"No, I know all'a that," Hatsume says, looking at the paper again. "You told me this was a concept design for an 'elytra,' which is—if I'm reading your scrawl and interpreting you right—basically like a jetpack on steroids or a pair of dragonfly wings but better. I get that. But..." The mechanic holds out the drawing to Tommy, as if he doesn't know what's on it—which is the elytra, of course. She then reaches somewhere, gets a pencil, and then uses the eraser end to basically circle the entire thing. "What is this."

"An elytra," the blond repeats. Hatsume pulls the paper down, momentarily silent.

"Chief, I'mma be honest," she solemnly begins, moving to set her hands on his shoulders. She stops that quickly, instead lightly putting the flat side of the paper there, her hand making wrinkles in the page from how she holds the other end. "This is worse than my sketches at four when I'm only running on a Monster and coffee concoction—home-brewed by yours truly—and have been awake for at least a day straight." And then, "...No offense. Or as little as you can get from it."

Tommy is fucking *offended* anyway. Not just for how she *violates* her coffee, no, but for her blatant disrespect to his superior artistic talent. He snatches the paper from her hands, looking at it again.

"It looks perfectly fine!" He protests, tearing his eye away from his masterpiece of a concept sketch to look at her.

Hatsume purses her lips, eventually shrugging. "Whatever you say," she placates, a smile suddenly on her lips again as she nonchalantly shrugs. "Just describe whatever you're thinking in words instead, eh?"

The blond narrows his eye at her. "...Right."

"Anyway!" She claps once, "Elytras! That's *such* a good idea—if we can actually develop them, of course. To be light enough to carry, strong enough to not break and also hold a person up, run on wind currents rather than power..." Her expression falters a little. "'Kay, that's gonna be tough. These'll have to be suited specifically for people whose Quirks can make an updraft or something, or for those who constantly, like, dive from high altitudes or something... Gotta have good wind control mechanics, too..."

"Eh, whatever!" Hatsume exclaims, her smile back on her face. "If we mash elements of an elytra with a jetpack or something, I'm sure we can figure something out. I'll have fun with this anyways!" She turns to Tommy, raising an eyebrow. "Ideas?"

Tommy's smiles again, tiny but no less excited. "*Fireworks.*"

Hatsume gets entirely distracted by all the gear Tommy can make, and it's all because they had to think about how the user of the elytra-jetpack can protect themselves from blast damage or force.

Maijima walks back in eventually. Tommy notices, of course he does, but the reason he stands stock still is because he's reminded that he and Hatsume are surrounded by various unloaded, sheathed, or dull weapons, as well as various sets of armor Tommy had to make. Tommy's like, buried in a pile of this shit; he can't move or else it'll all tumble down and make a grating, ear-wrenching noise. Hatsume, on the other hand, is giggling as she holds an iron and gold helm in the light, specifically shaped to the heads of two mannequins she has at her disposal.

("What the fuck are—why do you have those?" Tommy wasn't sure how he didn't notice them before, what with how they're wood in a room where everything's practically made of metals.

"What, Ayako and Yasushi?" Hatsume patted the two blank, wooden human-like figures held up by metal poles stabbed underneath through their torso. Tommy winced; he did not need to think of that. "*These* babies help me make sure I connect fabrics and stuff right when I make things, as well as see how they look. Like, I know the measurements and all of my commissioner, but sometimes I mess stuff up when actually making them, y'know? And the commissioner can't be here all the time. These two help me and my class a lot!"

Tommy was gonna question the fact that they have names, but in all honesty, he'd name them, too. Instead, he said, "At least give them faces or some shit."

Hatsume sighed wistfully. "Most of us are working on it; others are scared of seeing Ayako and Yasushi staring at them all of a sudden. Maijima's placed a 'unanimous vote' thing for whatever classroom decision we do..."

If everyone created constant explosions on a daily basis, Tommy doesn't need to wonder why.)

"Uh," Tommy starts smartly, inclining his head at the teacher. The blunt edge of a helm tugs at his collar. "Hi?"

Maijima stares. "You better have a place to put all of that, because in U.A., we most certainly don't." Turning around to walk back from where he came, he adds, "There's also a couple minutes left. Hurry up."

Tommy immediately gets to work, Hatsume freezing before she quickly follows his lead.

Prime, Tommy has *never* made like ten chests, shoved everything in them, got a phone number to cause more chaos, and then ran *that* fast before. That was a speedrun of its own league, and before the Dream SMP got fucked, Tommy did a shit ton of those for fun. Never broke any records, though. 'Twas all for fun and a little competition (until Phil and Techno left.)

Wow. That isn't a thought he wants to linger on, especially as he enters Class 1-A again for more boredom, giving a simple wave at the chorus of greetings he gets. Not that the class is boring, the stuff they're *taught* is.

"What pros are y'all choosing?" Ashido asks to the general class, her arms stretched across her desk. She holds her list of agencies in her hands, her eyes almost drooping as she looks at them. Uraraka leans over her shoulder, inspecting Ashido's list herself. "I have less options than I thought..."

Tommy ignores the fact that Mineta's first to answer and also the answer itself (oh *fuck* he's gotta find out how to take him to therapy), instead zoning back in when Ojiro walks to Ashido's desk, commenting, "That... is pretty weird, huh? Having less options. You got pretty far; the only reason you didn't advance farther was because you were against Todoroki."

Ashido huffs, crinkling the papers. "Right?!" She pouts.

"Could be that there's not a lot of people with acid Quirks?" Tommy pipes in, glancing at the list himself. Eh... he knows none of these heroes. Maybe Tommy's forgotten some of Izuku's rambles, or these people are just *that* obscure. "'Cause, y'know. Acid's dangerous. Melts stuff. And I don't think most people or heroes know how to... deal with that safely if they aren't adapted to it themselves."

Ashido hums. "Most people with acid Quirks prolly do smart things and go take science majors and study chemicals a lot," she agrees. "Kinda sucks for me, though!"

In Tommy's peripheral vision, Momo approaches the increasingly crowded desk, looking quite heistant. Finally, she moves closer, tapping Ashido's shoulder. "Um," she starts, "may I suggest some heroes for you, then...?"

Ashido beams. "'Course!"

Tommy backs away, letting that table continue talking and all. He glances around, his single-eyed gaze finally landing on Izuku's bush of hair, who's practically buried in his stack of internships like a book nerd. He's a little late, really, since Uraraka had already moved on from the previous convo way before him and is partway through with asking what pro Izuku chose, but just in time to hear Izuku's answer.

...Tommy should've been later, actually, because Izuku is mumbling and will keep mumbling for an hour if he isn't stopped. He just walks up, raises a hand, and gently bonks the green-haired student on the top of his head, successfully knocking him out of that analysis trance. It pushes him down more than Tommy thought; did he use too much strength?

"Huhzuwah?" Izuku says, whipping his head around wildly before he finally looks up to Tommy's form. An embarrassed blush rises to his cheeks, but he still smiles, giving a hesitant wave. He doesn't look hurt. "You're back! Th-Thanks for that hit; got a little too carried away again, ahaha..."

"That isn't *bad*, kero," Tsu interrupts, closer to Izuku's desk than Tommy thought. He lowers his hand as the both of them turn to her, watching Ashido, Ojiro, and Uraraka walks over. "Just means you're giving it the amount of thought it deserves."

"A-Ah..." Uraraka scratches the back of her neck. "Is it bad that I've already decided mine, then?"

Ashido gapes a little, which soon stretches into a smile. "Who is it?"

"Battle Hero: Gunhead's agency," the brunette answers, doing a little punch. Tommy cocks his head to the side, trying to connect the name in his thoughts. Izuku's talked about them—him, if he remembers right—once or twice, maybe. Something about the discrimination he faces because of the way he fights villains or something...

Uraraka thinks about something that causes her to start waving her hands in a frenzy towards Tommy, panic written all over her face. "I-It's not that, that the hero training here isn't good!" She hastily cries out, her voice lowering with each word that spills out after. "You and Aizawa are good teachers, I swear! It's just that, um, just that I thought I need more training from people who aren't you...? That—like—I need more variety in opponents and attack methods? There's also, um, a lot more to it, but that's the main stuff. Does that make sense...?"

Tommy blinks, digesting all of that. Finally, he nods. "That's the smart choice, I'd think," he voices, continuing even when slight shock crosses Uraraka's face. "It's the next best option for more experience besides like, villains. Can't just keep using staffs or fighting against Aizawa forever, even if none of you can defeat either of us."

"Yet," Ashido stresses, grinning at him with playful competitiveness in her eyes. "We'll best you one day!"

"Mhm," Tommy lies, crossing his arms, "yeah, totally." He glances down where Izuku's begun to mumble about Gunhead's strength, as well as how he fights and whatnot. As Uraraka laughs softly at Izuku, Tommy's eye narrows, looking a little closer—

"Midoriya," Ojio begins reluctantly, getting Izuku's attention, "are you... trembling? Did the Sports Festival strain you *that* much?" It's the same thing Tommy just saw right now. (He berates himself internally for how dull his eyes are now. U.A. isn't safe anymore.)

Izuku's eyes dart around for a moment, bemusement plastered all over his face, before he straightens and looks at Ojio. "Oh, that's just the air chair exercise!" He cheerfully explains. Was that why he was pushed down when Tommy lightly hit him? Prime, has he been doing that all fucking day?

Tommy sighs tiredly as the group gives out exclamations of surprise, of which quickly shifts to the mechanics of the exercise itself and how it's *not* outdated when Mineta gives his input. He mentally takes note to tell Toshinori that Izuku's overworking himself again, the reasoning probably something to do with OFA again.

(He glances to the other side of the classroom where Iida sits. Tommy can't read his expression.)

"Please stop doing those bizarre-ass fucking entrances, or whatever those are called," Tommy asks, a hint of desperation in his tone. He plops himself on a chair as Toshinori laughs nervously, also seating himself down on something. The pro hero genuinely looks a little unkempt, for once, even in his bright yellow suit. "Every time you shout your position, I get a lot more confused to why OFA *isn't* an open secret."

Izuku snorts, sitting down in a chair, too. Regardless, he turns to his mentor, asking, "So, what's going on...?"

"Right," Toshinori says, running a hand through the part of his hair that isn't floating. How the fuck are the two streaks of hair still raised even when he's like, being rushed or something? "Getting straight to the point, you've got another offer from a hero I know!"

"...So I need to intern with them, then," Izuku mutters quietly, slumping with a dispirited expression. He quickly shakes his head, straightening when Toshinori turns to look at him and ignoring Tommy's pointed stare. "Who are th-they?"

Toshinori hesitates. "His name would be Gran Torino," he answers, looking significantly more nervous by the second. "He was a teacher at U.A. for only a year, and he was my homeroom teacher. He's in on OFA, too; I believe he asked for you because of that." With every single word that continues spilling from Toshinori's mouth laced with anxiety, Izuku looks more terrified, and Tommy? He's fucking *relieved* he doesn't have to deal with that, or even see whoever Gran Torino is.

"Gran Torino was the sworn friend of my predecessor." Here, Toshinori's face twists into one of pain that's almost-instantly covered up. "He retired a while ago, so I forgot to count him..." And then, he *begins to talk to himself*. Izuku's face blanches significantly, which shouldn't be possible since he already looked at his limit like moments ago. "Was it because I wrote of you when I sent him the letter? Or because he couldn't just stand by and watch my inadequate teaching...? Going so far with using his old name to make an offer..."

"A-And," Izuku shakily interrupts, his own form trembling a bit; whether from his nerves or the whole floating chair exercise, Tommy can't tell. "You. You want *m-me* to go with *him*?"

"It would be the safest option," Toshinori provides. Not "the best." Tommy tenses, eye narrowing. Maybe he can convince Nedzu to change his mind about the whole Support Department thing. "So that no one who isn't in the know pieces together the innerworkings of OFA. And Gran Torino most likely knows OFA better than I do. But, it is your choice."

The pro hero holds out the tiniest fuckin' slip of paper a letter could be on with a trembling hand. Tommy snatches it from his grip before Izuku can or before it can slip from Toshinori's grip, opening it to scan the contents. "Is he gonna hurt Izuku?" Tommy questions, it coming out more like a demand than anything as he summarizes the thing in his head. Something-something Hero Internship offer, something-something OFA (fucking risky as hell), something-something Toshinori. Nothing about specialties, training, or what the fuck will go on. He hands it to Izuku before he shreds the damn thing.

As Izuku takes it with trembling hands, Tommy glances at Toshinori's shocked face. "Well?" He impatiently asks.

"No!" Toshinori hurriedly defends, "No, of course not!" He pauses, pursing his lips. "...Not in a traumatizing way, at least? He is... a harsh teacher, let's say."

Tommy feels like he's about to close his eye from how hard he's squinting. Either this man is lying by understating how traumatized he is, or he's just a *regular* scared when it comes to horrible teaching methods. (Huh. Maybe that's why Toshinori isn't a good teacher.)

He raps his fingers along his upper arm. "...That sounds like what a wrongun would say," Tommy sneers, though the anger is only directed at this whole situation, "but..."

"I-It's still my choice, isn't it?" Izuku stammers. It sounds like a plea. "I. I can refuse this, r-right?"

Toshinori nods. "Of course you can, Young Midoriya," he affirms, though his nervousness is still in there a little. At this, Izuku takes a shuddering breath, visibly biting the inside of his cheek as he stares at the note.

"And, and he—Gran Torino didn't do a-anything too bad?"

"He's only put fear into the hearts of my graduating class," Toshinori supplies, maybe to lighten the mood, but it is *not* helping. When faced with Tommy's glare, however, the man clears his throat.

"Apologies. He will not give you wounds or scars that last for a lifetime. He will, however, push you to the brink constantly and make you move no matter what."^[3]

"I—" Izuku stops biting his cheek, resumes doing that, and then lowers the note to give Toshinori and Tommy a determined stare. "O-Okay. I'll. I'll do it. You said he wouldn't hurt me, and he knows OFA better than anyone, so. Yeah."

With another nod, Toshinori glances down to the floor, his gaze moving back up to Izuku and Tommy. "Sorry, again," he says, "for worrying you two."

Immediately, Tommy scoffs, crossing his arms. "Tommy Innit does not get fucking *worried*," he states with a scowl. "It's just that none of this is trustworthy." *It's just that none of you are trustworthy anymore*, he wants to say.

Toshinori might've gotten the message from the way he winces, or maybe he's thinking it wasn't a good idea to show his fear in front of traumatized teenagers. "...Sorry."

"What's done is done," Tommy mumbles. "Is that it from you?"

"...Yes, it is."

"Great!" Tommy starts making it for the door. "Izuku, get an internship form and do all of that. I'm gonna—" He doesn't fucking know, "—just, go home. Yeah." He exits, breaking into a sprint with his heart unreasonably beating like he's fucking scared and his lungs inhaling the scent of smoke.

If Tommy can't fucking go and destroy some shit in his mines right now, he's afraid he might accidentally destroy someone else.

Chapter End Notes

1. HIT AS IN LIKE A BONK. AIZAWA WANTED TO BONK HIM ON THE HEAD. tommy is jsut unreliable as a narrator^{[\[return to text\]](#)}

2. yeah, the teachers move in japan, not the students. as a westerner, it's fuckin Wild imo^{[\[return to text\]](#)}

3. toshinori doesn't know like. too much abt the trauma izu or tommy have, but he has eyes (despite the beginning of canon implying he doesnt (A ROOFTOP, ALL MIGHT.)) and they're enough to see that these kids are Not Alright. ^{[\[return to text\]](#)}

take flight.

Chapter Notes

exams + getting sick repeatedly is not a good combo for my motivation and writing ability

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy wakes up in his house at ass 'o' clock in the morning, and the first thing he thinks is that mining for random shit all night is tiring because his limbs feel numb, sore, and tingly. That isn't too new; he's far used to waking up with aching limbs and exhaustion still weighing on his shoulders. It just fucking sucks.

The next thing he feels is his instinct gut, which has been bothering him every since the fucking Sports Festival, is acting up again. So, naturally, Tommy does *not* panic because he is a Big Man who can handle this shit, instead scouring his memories for what the fuck is up today. The only thing important it can dredge up is that Iida's been acting weird and that today is the day that his class is going to their fucking internships.

Which Tommy isn't allowed to go to.

...He stares up at his ceiling for a long, long time.

5:03

<big man> Cancel the fuckin internships

<big man> *Internships

<big man> Whatever the fuck

<rat man> Oh? Why so?

<big man> Something isn't fuckin' right today

<big man> I'm being genuine right now

<big man> Something isn't fucking right, and it's on a USJ scale

<rat man> Are you absolutely positive?

< big man > *WOULDNT BE FUCKIN TELLIN YOU THIS IF I WASNT NOW WOULD I*

Tommy erases that before he sends it. He takes a breath, focuses on the ways his eyes strain due to the light coming from his communicator's screen, and types again.

<big man> YES I am fucking positive

<big man> If you can't, least tell Iida some bullshit excuse to not go

A little icon pops up to show Nedzu typing. It doesn't disappear until minutes after Tommy sends his last message.

<rat man> Unfortunately, the internships cannot be delayed. With the USJ incident and the catastrophe that was the Sports Festival, the Hero Course's education, specifically Class 1-A's, has already been pushed back repeatedly. Despite U.A.'s—and therefore my—reputation, I do not think I can convince the Board of Education to give your students more days off. They cannot and will not believe your gut instinct; even most of the staff here would not believe you.

Nedzu himself scarcely does, then. It's reasonable. He barely has reason to. Tommy is just a ragtag vigilante they'd caught—it's a miracle he's trusted at all. The only person who might truly believe him is Aizawa, and even then the underground hero bases most of his decisions on logic. Tommy hopes that though his instincts may not be as honed, Aizawa trusts them as much as Tommy does his own.

<rat man> However, it is possible to warn the heroes taking interns to be extra alert, as well as transfer Iida to another agency either of his own will or forcibly. This does come with the drawback of him potentially not learning what is essential in his internship, as if the only heroes available do not have Quirks related to speed, which is highly likely, then Iida may not have much use being there. Unless he finds something to learn, of course, like he might have found in Manual.

<rat man> Regardless, I am most certain that we do not have a chance of transferring Iida forcibly unless/until something devastating happens. Once again, you are basing this decision based off of a gut feeling.

Tommy purses his lips, fingers trembling. He thinks of Midnight's fall and Toshinori's awful teaching and Izuku's mistrust of his own mentor and the aftermath of the USJ, and remembers Aizawa's promise. He wants to believe in it again, in whatever heroes Aizawa has seen, in what All Might represents, in the dream Izuku aspires to be (and in what L'Manburg once was—) even if they've all lost reason.

<big man> Okay

<big man> Xtra heroes re fine

<big man> Make sure theyre enough, alright?

<rat man> Alright. Thank you for informing me.

Tommy doesn't respond. Communicator face-down and tossed haphazardly on his ruffled bed, he's already sprung up and begun rifling through his chests, slipping his eye-patch on and gathering whatever he needs.

"Today's fuckin' shit," Tommy blurts out.

Aizawa, who had just got out of his car to get Tommy since he doesn't have his own for the sake of the world, raises a brow at him. Now that Tommy thinks about it, he doesn't really know where they're going. With the Sports Festival aftermath, no one's really told him how the internships would work.

Tommy gets back on track. "The bloody internships," Tommy says, because that should clear up everything. "They're shit." His fingers fidget with the hem of his shirt. It's not his usual red and white t-shirt, but one of the things that he'd gotten on the mall spree: a teal sweater, of sorts, with "Club Sunday" on it. He's worn this and the other shit he got only a few times since then.

The underground hero's eyes go sharp in understanding. "Nedzu messaged me," he states, a frown marring his face as he looks away. There's always something ruining Aizawa's face all the time, now, more than before; a crease to his brows, dark bags under his bloodshot eyes, the harsher downturn of his lips. He's gained ten years of his life in these past few weeks—in this entire year—and it's a wonder his hair isn't turning gray yet. He needs a break so badly, it's not funny anymore.

Aizawa sighs suddenly, dragging a hand down his face. He turns to his car, gets in the driver's seat, and after Tommy locks the door to his house, he follows and sits in the shotgun. When the hero starts backing out, he mumbles, "Put your seat belt on. Manual's sidekicks will be following Iida and Manual as they do patrols and the like. Heroes around Manual's agency have been told to keep an eye out for anything suspicious. Anything else?"

Tommy swallows, the reality of the amount of trust he holds weighing his hands down. "It's—that's good, I think," he says, his fingers reluctantly clasping the seat belt around him. The polyester practically burns on his chest, a kind of shackle he still isn't used to. It makes his skin writhe. "Can't do much. Gonna give him some ambrosia to him. I don't know what else."

Aizawa nods, eyes still on the road. Tommy doesn't have anything else to add, so he instead looks out of the car window next to him. Buildings and people blur into a mesh of colours like everything would on a fast minecart. He doesn't feel any awe like the first few times he's been in this thing—really, he just feels jealous. They're all just smears of colours. Colours don't have to worry about death-prone kids or fucked-up adults or trauma instincts that tell them "hey, everything will go wrong today, and in this server there's barely anything you can bloody fucking do about it."

Tommy huffs quietly, briefly checking his inventory. He's brought all the golden apple slices he's got, about fifty or so. Twenty of the seventy-ish he had went into making ambrosia, which he has like twelve small vials of. It's... not a lot, if shit like this keeps happening.

With Tommy's dogshit luck, shit like this *will* keep happening.

Tommy closes his inventory, saddled with the truth that once he runs out, all he can do is wait for it all to happen, fight however he can, and pray his class can survive it like he will.

"Eh?" Izuku blinks at Tommy in surprise. "You're here?"

Tommy staggers back and mocks a gasp, entirely offended. "What, like I can't? Like you don't want me to be?"

Immediately, Izuku sputters. "No no no, that's not—I I-I was just—" He groans, burying his face in his hands. One of them seems to be holding a suitcase of sorts with a bright neon-green number on it, number eighteen. Probably holds whatever he brought from home or some shit.

Laughing, Tommy lightly knocks his friend's forehead back with his fist. "Just joking, dude." He gets a muffled huff in response.

Currently, half of the class is standing at the entrance of U.A., all of them a little early for the ride to their internships. Aizawa's gonna take the entire class to the train station (which are just stops for weird snake-cars that run on rails and fit more than a small family, which is a minor comfort in everything Tommy still has no fucking clue about in this world) they're supposed to be at with a large ass bus, which should, according to him, be a thirty to forty minute trip. Even then, they're waiting for the rest of the class to get here. There's plenty of time for Tommy to do what he needs to.

Mood suddenly sullied by that thought, Tommy sighs. Izuku uncovers his face a little, his eyes peering through the gaps of his fingers as he watches the blond open seemingly nothing in the air. However, when Tommy brings out a tiny container of ambrosia, Izuku's hands slip entirely off his face, revealing his abruptly terrified face.

"Oh," he says, taking it. The miracle liquid sits in Izuku's calloused palm, something people in this server would probably die for, and yet all he seems to do is just... stare at it. He looks up, then, his eyes wide. "Th-This..."

Tommy nods, lowering his voice. "Yeah. Aizawa told me your internship would be near Iida's?" The man said it was, a long moment after their first conversation today had ended, but Tommy doesn't have a full layout of all the internships and agencies because researching that shit would've been boring. "Was gonna give one or two of these to him, but..." He takes a glance around the area again, and sure enough, Iida... isn't here. Yet. Pretty odd for someone like him, but Tommy'll get him once the trip starts. "Yeah. Just in case. Need armor or some shit too, or?"

Izuku brings the glass container close, soon pocketing it in his pants. He fidgets with his tie in thought. "No, I... I don't... think... so?"

"Sounding mighty dubious there," Tommy snorts.

"W-Well! It's just...!" Izuku purses his lips. "Your armor's good, but it's also just metal. The stuff made in the Support Department, like my costume—" He raises his suitcase, and oh, never mind then, [\[1\]](#) "—they're made of like, special fabrics and metals and stuff. Y'know, metal alloys, nylon fabrics... customized things? L-Like, they can have heat resistance and be waterproof and stuff! And they can be tougher than iron!"

Heat resistance... Tommy tilts his head. Is there like, shit that does that automatically? No enchantments or Quirk bullshit? *Genuinely*? If so, that's... very fucking over-powered, especially if he could make an enchanting table or something. Then again, he has little lapis, and enchantment tables also require ancient Galactic books. Dungeons probably exist here, though, so he could prolly find the books and all.

...But if that's true, why has Tommy not encountered one yet? He's spent many nights down in his mineshafts just mindlessly digging. He has several chests just filled with raw ores, and would have double that of cobble had he not thrown most of that in a lava pool. Maybe he's not at the right Y level? No, no, he's been mining at eleven for a while now, surely he should've encountered one.

Do people here even *know* Galactic? This server has Quirks that can pull off enchantments just fine, and their materials can just... naturally be enchanted, like from the get-go. Plus, it's a lot more advanced and shit than most other servers. When servers are generated, they're usually dominated by English and Galactic, yet Galactic was specifically a language made by the deities for players to make enhancements on their shit 'cause they imparted a little of their power or some shit in them. It's possible that this place just... has no need for any of that anymore.

...Hm. Has he ever gotten an EXP point from mining?

Tommy thinks about it, trudging through hazy, tired memory after hazy, tired memory. And in all of them, he hadn't seen a single one. He'd been so used to them he never realized they were gone. Albeit, Tommy has a little over half a stack of EXP bottles from his... death, but if he has *those*, then that doesn't even explain why he isn't getting them *naturally*.

Did the fucking admin *disable* natural EXP gain? Or EXP in general? If he opens an EXP potion, will it all dissolve into the air or some shit? And if dungeons really don't exist, he thinks, emotions whirling in his chest, then he can't risk opening any of the bottles. Either they're too valuable, or they're fucking *useless*.

Fuck. This is all *another* thing Tommy can't use to his advantage. Just to check, he discreetly opens his inventory, glancing all over it—where is the EXP bar?

"—mmy? Tommy!"

Tommy snaps out of it, making a noise of surprise that wasn't and couldn't be classified as a yelp because he's so much bigger than that. In his not-panic, he ends up batting at the air where his inventory is to close it instead of flicking his wrist. Izuku recoils, also pulling away the hand he was waving in front of Tommy. "If I knew how much you disliked that," he mumbles, "I wouldn't have said anything. Sorry."

Tommy's eye widens in surprise. "What? No, no—I, uh, that was just different shit!" He hastily says. "Was just thinking about shit! 'S nothing, Big Man! 'M not hurt or anythin'!"

Izuku brightens a little, smiling shyly. "That's good," he breathes, adjusting the grip on his suitcase. "Still, I'm s—"

He gets no warning when Tommy bonks his head. "Shut the fuck up. Nothing to apologize for."

"Right," Izuku chuckles weakly, clutching the spot where the blond hit him. "Sor—" He covers his mouth for a moment, laughing when Tommy huffs. "A-Anyway! While you zoned out, the rest of the class came in! I think." Discreetly, he gestures in a specific direction, still holding the ambrosia. When Tommy glances over, Iida is there, resolutely looking ahead. "Are you going to...?"

Threading his fingers through his hair again, Tommy sighs tiredly. "Yeah, yeah, I am," he grumbles, and in one smooth hand motion, he has another vial of the gold liquid in his hand. However, he does pause, his head turning back to Izuku briefly. "...You have any idea what Iida's thinking? Or what's up?"

Izuku purses his lips. He shakes his head no, downcast once more. "He's... he's been distant with us, too. Me and Uraraka."

Ah. Fucking hell.

Tommy huffs. He mutters a small "thanks" that Izuku responds to with a minute bow before heading towards the presumable target for all the fucking danger in the world.

Moving closer, he can truly respect how much Iida's trying to hide. Hell, had Tommy not been used to searching for body language and emotions, he'd have thought Iida was oddly fine for someone who lost their brother. (Brief flickers of memories flash across his eyes of Wilbur and Techno and Tubbo but he does not, cannot, *will not* think about them, not now. [Then when?]).

(...Soon. Whenever Tommy won't be a pussy about it.)

Iida holds himself well. His head is high, shoulders relaxed, a hand loosely gripping his suitcase. That's where all the flaws start popping up, though. Tommy can see the tenseness of his jaw, the forced, too-low slope of his shoulders, and the way his fingers twitch. The way he faces no one is particularly telling, too.

"Oi," Tommy calls out, brusque as usual. Iida doesn't turn, probably thinking that Tommy's talking to someone else, so he adds, "Iida." That gets a reaction: a pause too long before the student turns, a smile plastered on his face.

"Yes, Si—Tommy?" It's near disgusting how fake it all is. Tommy can't resist scrunching his face up in the face of it all, the way Iida's smile looks so easy but doesn't reach his eyes, and how forcefully relaxed his posture is, and—*ugh*. Regardless, he does smother that look away and shove the vial of ambrosia to him, letting Iida blink confusedly at it for a few seconds.

"Take it." Tommy practically demands, pushing the vial out a little further. Iida takes a moment longer before he does, carefully grasping the glass and lifting it near him to observe it. He doesn't get a chance to ask anything, though, because Tommy explains, "These're am—a really strong healing thing. You can drink it, smear it over injuries, whatever. One for you, distribute the other vial to your mentors. *Don't fuckin'* waste it, alright? Tell that to those you're working with. And don't let anyone else keep any remains—any of it unused goes back to me." Prime, he's starting to have doubts. If whoever Iida's working with decides to spread ambrosia around to villains, and then they analyze it...

Faintly, Iida nods. "Thank you, sir," he manages, pocketing the vial and bowing. "I'll be sure to use it wisely." Tommy feels his face contort into a grimace. No matter how many times he says that he prefers "Tommy," Iida always refers to him as sir occasionally. The slip-up in the beginning is progress to not doing that, and Tommy's still working on it.

Iida turns away then, most likely thinking this conversation was over. Tommy, however, shifts on his feet, gnawing at his lip, thinking.

Oh, *fuck it*—

"Are you okay?"

That gets a near-instantaneous reaction. Iida startles, tension lining his shoulders, but Tommy has to kudos him for not whipping around in a panic or out of shock. He instead turns his head smoothly, just enough so that Tommy can still see a smile on his face, but there's a little falter in his eyes. "Of course I am," he blatantly lies, something sharper threatening to come out of the surface if Tommy prods further.

Clearly, that's all he's willing to disclose. Tommy sighs, knowing this is a lost cause, and takes a step back. "Just making sure." He placates, shoving his hands in his pockets. "And one more thing: don't fuckin' do anything reckless or mindless or whatever." With those last eloquent words, Tommy walks back to Izuku, who stares at Iida with some type of sadness in his eyes after the blond mouths "no use" to him.

And soon after that, the class leaves. Oh sure, Tommy gets a significant amount of waves and goodbyes and all that jazz—especially as they begin loading into the bus, what with Koda's desperate signing and Ashido plastering herself against the windows—but it doesn't exactly hit him until the thing actually starts moving that yeah, shit's changing. His students are leaving, and his instincts are screaming, and his mind is whirring with panic, but Tommy can do nothing more than watch them just... get farther and farther away until they're nothing more than a dot in the distance. The only comfort that soothes his mind is that the heroes and teachers are at least taking more precautions than they did in the USJ attack.

It's agonizing. Tommy bites the inside of his cheek, lets his fingers dig into his arms, and makes himself turn around and walk back into U.A.'s claustrophobic walls.

Izuku does not expect to find a dead body when he opens the door to where he's supposed to be interning. His mind immediately begins half-spiraling half-compartmentalizing what he sees because he's already so used to this kind of stuff, of these life-or-death situations, that him conducting an internal spatial analysis is his first response.

He goes as quiet and unmoving as a statue, but his eyes are in a frenzy. The room is dark, meaning there could be someone hiding in the shadows. This is his supposed mentor on the ground, based off of what Izuku's gleamed from a research moment on the bus and train to make sure he knows who Gran Torino is, as well as the hero clothes. So whoever killed Gran Torino is strong enough to *kill* Gran Torino, someone who All Might made a show of *fearing*, even though it was in jest.

However, there are shards of a plate on the ground, as well as a fork, and though not bloodied, it could very well mean that someone poisoned Gran Torino's food. No, no, never mind, Gran Torino seems to have been—been gutted. Did the culprit use the fork? Why, then, is it not—?

Gran Torino's head whips up, a brilliant smile on his face and blood—oh, not quite that, Izuku thinks dazedly, because blood would flow a lot smoother down his face—as he exclaims, "I'm alive!"

Izuku is so, so tempted to close the door and leave. *So* tempted. He can't, though—not when this could still be his only opportunity to get help and be stronger.

Instead, he slumps against the door to the building, releasing so much tension it almost makes his knees fall to the floor. The breath he releases is equally cathartic and trembling, and with a little more effort than he probably should need, Izuku picks himself up and partially focuses on breathing as his supposed mentor turns the lights on. "Yes, right, that just happened," he mumbles to himself. "You aren't d-dead."

"I'm not," Gran Torino confirms once more as he leans on a wooden cane with a shaky body. It's like this is something he does to all of his students and past interns and—it makes Izuku want to crawl out of his skin, how calm the hero's being. Maybe he's overreacting. He's probably overreacting. This is all just some harsh way to introduce him back into the world of reality... or something "meaningful" like that. "Just dropped a string of sausages with ketchup poured all over them. Sorry for scaring you, kid. Er... who are you?"

This man is not sorry, not at all. Izuku's watched and then rewatched clips of him, of how he moves his legs and controls his Quirk, Jet. Gran Torino has a clear mastery of how his legs move, even in his old age, because he has to so that he can keep using his Quirk. He knows what he did, could've easily gotten up when Izuku entered—but he didn't.

Izuku does not say that, however, because he's used to All Might and Toshinori. He knows how this works.

He strengthens his grip on his suitcase. "Midoriya Izuku, sir," he replies. "From U.A. You're... supposed to be my mentor." Izuku tries to take most of the underlying bitterness out of the last sentence, and it works, for the most part.

When Gran Torino gestures for Izuku to speak up, he wonders how long this old façade will last in comparison to Toshinori's as he repeats his name. He keeps himself prepared, holds himself well like Tommy taught him. Though, half of him pays attention to Gran Torino while the other keeps observing the area, even with its sparse interior.

"...Who are you?" Gran Torino repeats again. Izuku struggles to keep his smile on his face as he sets his suitcase on the ground. Being with straight-to-the-point teachers like Tommy and Aizawa have

really, really spoiled him, huh.

"Midoriya Izuku from U.A. You're s-supposed to be my mentor." Gran Torino signed some sort of contract to agree to this internship in one way or another, anyway. Unless his memory is truly that poor for his age, Izuku *knows* that Gran Torino knows who he is. Just in case, he adds in a hushed whisper, "Toshinori recommended me to you, so."

The way Gran Torino looks at him uncomprehendingly both grates on his patience and slams his miserable self-esteem back down on him. Was this really the wrong man? No, did age change him this much? Izuku only had a refresher on who he was, maybe there's some newer articles about his retirement or something? Are retired heroes allowed to get interns?

...Or perhaps this is a sort of test? Izuku can't exactly see Gran Torino's entire face no matter how expressive his mask is, so maybe he's analyzing Izuku harshly. What is the purpose to *any* of this, anyway? Of the dead body act and this whole charade (if it was one)? The former has some sort of shock value to it and is a bad first impression, maybe of how clumsy or old Gran Torino's making himself be. The latter, something that his patience wavers to, something that would make most people—including himself, it seems—want to rage.

Clumsiness, aging, shock, rage... *underestimation*. Things that catch Izuku off-guard.

Izuku slams a hand over his mouth in case he mumbled any of that aloud, but thankfully, Gran Torino's said nothing. Or maybe he did, and the hero's refusing to acknowledge—

On some unknown instinct, Izuku grabs his suitcase and yanks his hand back. He zones back into reality in an instant, watching Gran Torino, whose hand is reached out towards his suitcase. He's moved close in an instant, something that his previously shaking body wouldn't have been able to do without a cane at least, and now, as Gran Torino looks at him, there's this feeling that Izuku's being stripped to his very core.

Izuku won't be able to handle it, if Gran Torino goes back to playing clueless again.

He musters up his courage. "...Sir," Izuku says. "If you... if you're really my mentor, I can't exactly keep learning under... no offense, but wh-whatever this is." He gestures to the general direction of Gran Torino. "You've probably heard of the USJ attack if you've watched the Sports Festival. And you also know what's happened at the end of the F-Festival. In both situations, everyone was... helpless."

Izuku fidgets with his sleeve. "Surely you know it's painful. We needed All Might, but he barely came in time for the USJ. He wasn't there for the Sports Festival." He wasn't there when Izuku was standing on the rooftop and—"...N-None of us can keep relying on him for l-long, too, especially as he weakens. And as the ninth holder, th-that's very, very true for me. So when that time comes, when All Might has to s-stop being the Symbol of Peace and the people are helpless, I-I'll have to step up, you know?"

"So I *have* to keep getting stronger. I-I can't be All Might, I'm far too—fragile for that, but I want to protect those I love, I want to help others, and above all, I don't want to be helpless anymore." Izuku's been thinking about it all for a while, yet saying it aloud makes him feel raw but lighter. He steels his resolve, looking at his supposed mentor again. "Villains don't wait, sir. I think we both know that more than we should. If this is the training I'll get, then... I'll have to leave."

He doesn't want to be weak. He's so, so sick of it.

Gran Torino steps back. He's still silent and staring at Izuku in a way that makes him feel bare even as he jumps away further. There's no act anymore, it seems. "Fire off One for All at me."

Izuku's mind stutters to a halt as he processes the question, because. A shot of OFA in a small building like this? With furniture and all? And, well, surely Gran Torino's watched the Festival, right? That was how most heroes chose who they wanted to intern with: by watching the Sports Festival and choosing who had potential. His circumstances are special, yeah, but surely he should've gotten a gleam of Izuku's control by now. Unless he hadn't watched it.

Should he even be thinking this hard about it? This really is the person Izuku's supposed to be mentored by, especially with the whole quick-as-a-flash movement that he's dodged. It was just one order, and maybe Gran Torino knows what he's doing?

...Oh, hopefully he doesn't have to pay for property damage or furniture.

Izuku sets his costume suitcase behind him, raising his hand, aims, and fires five percent.

"You're holding up better than I thought."

Izuku practically wheezes as he raises his forearm to wipe sweat off his forehead, looking up at Gran Torino wearily. There's a bit of ketchup splattered on his cheek, itching his skin, but he can't smear it off because that leaves him vulnerable. Most of the furniture around them is practically destroyed, mainly due to OFA. Gran Torino's Quirk and landings are far more... delicate? Less damaging than he thought. Of course, that makes sense—Gran Torino's had to be light on his feet for his fighting style, capitalizing speed and quick, calculated movements on the fly.

Honestly, Izuku's barely keeping up. Iida was fast, sure, but his movements were more limited, predictable, and more prone to error. The only one who could match Izuku's speed in U.A. was All Might, but he can't be around often (and... Izuku kind of doesn't want him to be. The pro hero's "panic" just made him think he was mocking Izuku's or Tommy's fears, which was probably unintentional and not done out of malice, and this time he's *apologized*, but Izuku's still reminded of rooftops and—)

With a yelp, Izuku throws himself to the side to dodge a swift kick, Gran Torino snickering even though he hadn't hit his protégé. He scrambles to his feet, breathing hard, waiting for the next move as Gran Torino continues with, "You also think far too much—"

Izuku resists making a face at that. He knows that already.

"—but All Might's done something right for once."

At that, Izuku can't help his grimace. He shoves it off once Gran Torino turns to him, watching. Doesn't seem like he's going to attack, though, even as he hops on the back of a haphazardly tilted couch to get on eye-level with Izuku. "You have technique," he states. "Different from his. Means you aren't caught up in admiration for All Might, which is good, but you're still copying off of someone."

Izuku doesn't know what to say to that, so he just nods, leaning away.

Gran Torino slips off the couch with ease, strolling towards the exit. Izuku watches him silently, still breathing heavily. He... wasn't knocked down by the man, in the end. That's—good?

"Not only that, but you're hesitating." Izuku blinks as Gran Torino stops right at the exit. "You didn't give your all in this exercise at all. I can't see your limits, boy—you haven't pushed yourself to them, not even in the Sports Festival. If you won't do that, then how am I supposed to teach you?"

...He hasn't? Been using his all, that is.

"What—?"

"Think about it," Gran Torino interrupts. When he turns around, there's no disapproving frown like Izuku expected, but a smile. "I'm gettin' us some grub."

"Wait," Izuku calls out, looking at the damage around him and then back at his mentor. "Wait, what about the—?!"

"You're in charge!"

Izuku sputters, but between one moment and the next, Gran Torino's gone.

Chapter End Notes

1. the fit is unchanged, just strengthened again by different metals and fabrics and stuff.[\[return to text\]](#)

===

II.

Ever So Closer.

The days *weeks* hours *months* seconds *howmuchtimehaspassed* go by agonizingly.

Dream is so so tired and tired and tired and *bored*. When he'd done the incantation for revival, it'd been difficult in itself to remember the words, but it'd been so entirely worth it. He just... hadn't expected the energy drain that came with.

It's still worth it. For the [REDACTED] - [REDACTED].

There's also. the visits.

Sapnap's visited him once. george has too. They hadn't been fun to play with. No one is anymore. Predictable and breakable, all of them. Pawns. Chess pieces built with love and molded with compassion. *Weak*. His dearest puppets, all wrapped around his strings.

(he craves them, wants their *power*; the dopamine rush of having friends and building his power and taking theirs and breaking their bonds and watching them *writhe because without him they are*. Nothing.

What tastes even better? Watching these broken people reunite by Tommy's influence to take down the crooked villain, seeing these broken people become *family*, if only for a moment? Or

doing that only to shatter once more under their own anger and sorrow and misery, becoming pliant under Dream's control again? It's why exile was so,

so

fun.

But Dream's most treasured day will be the moment Tommy sees him again. when tommy realizes that he will control him, no matter where he is

the imagery of his despair is delicious.)

A tug on his soul.

Dream giggles with happiness, feeling a bit drunk. "Gonna be free, free, free~!" He sing-songs, swaying on the ground with a smile that hurts his cheeks.

Sam doesn't respond to him anymore, the killjoy. Food is irregular and raw, too, sometimes even rotting—another reason for his low energy. The man's become tired of his shit, hasn't he?

It's fine. Dream doesn't care.

He need doesn't
but anyone TOMmy

He doesn't need anyone but Tommy.

Dream is fine. He'll make it out.

Tick. tock.
Mocking.

He blinks.

A flash of black asphalts and towering cities and a blue sky and green grass. A dream a hallucination; the forbidden fruit caused by [REDACTED] - [REDACTED].

Yes. Yes, yes yes.

He'll rip that forbidden fruit out and tear into it with his teeth and anger and make it bleed red red red.

Dream will make it out.

renaissance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There is no hero better than All Might. Truthfully, Chizome would say that there is no hero *at all* besides him.

All Might is goodwill personified. All Might reduced crime rates to lows no one had seen ever since the time before Quirks. All Might donates millions of his revenue and gifts to charities. All Might has never killed any villain. All Might always tries to smile for everyone, giving them hope. He is the definition of a hero, nothing like whatever mimicry every generation in society tries to pull when they graduate from hero schools. And a long time ago, Chizome had decided that if he has to become the stain of society in order to clean it, he will.

...Well, excusing one vigilante—if they're still active.

Chizome had heard of Dusk from the hushed whispers of disgusting villains who ran a human trafficking ring. He killed them, of course, but not before carefully inquiring them about the "trash-rat bastard" they so despised. Another target, Chizome had thought, listening to them fearfully say what they knew. Blond hair, a blue eye, a black-and-rouge get-up—Chizome's hands *burned* to get rid of this All Might fraud.

But he is patient, a learned thing from years of staying with his ideals. Society cannot be purged within a day, after all. So Chizome strayed near Musutafu, just enough to where he could observe the news articles about Dusk, and waited.

Yet Dusk was not like the others Chizome had targeted. Seemingly, they got up mostly every night, taking down drug cartels, trafficking rings, robberies, muggings, anything that society would condemn as villainous, and never saying a word. They gave the occasional pat on the back, according to victims, or their eye would squint like they were smiling. Dusk even left the occasional note for witnesses or the victims they'd save, mostly as a means of communication, yet they never stayed long enough for anyone to unmask them. That is, until they presumably got arrested, taken to the authorities and never heard from again.

Dusk had not boasted. Dusk had not lingered for any thankful word people had. Dusk was not flamboyant, arrogant like those who play this vigilante game Chizome is familiar with. Dusk had never killed, never caused life-long harm. Saving the people, even from minor encounters, was what all that mattered to them. (Dusk, he had thought, could have truly been like All Might, if given a little more time, a little more power, a little more... anything. He resists scowling; of course the government had ruined it.)

Dusk was innocent and righteous, just like all the others Chizome has spared. And equally, the lives of those at U.A. had not committed true wrongdoings—at least, not yet. With All Might teaching there, Chizome's sure that there will be less wannabe heroes this generation. So the fact that these bastards dare try to recruit him, when they attacked U.A.'s students—when they attacked *All Might*, is—

"Well?" The man-child with a hand on his face drawls. The photos pinched between two of his fingers crinkle the determined face of a green-haired boy. "Your choice?"

Chizome gets into a stance and sneers. Like *hell* is he letting them judge the lives of the innocent under his watch, taking away those with potential like the government did with Dusk.

Tenya cannot stop thinking about Stain and what he did to his brother. Every flash of red or off-white has him glancing around, and every gleam of metal makes him tense, and he has always respected those above him yet Tenya cannot find himself paying attention to Manual for a single second lest Manual gets killed, too. (Excuses, excuses. Tenya is so very selfish, and it will kill him soon, he knows.)

(*Legacy, legacy, legacy*, those voices whisper like they always have. A strike of dangerous intent stabs into Tenya for not the first time yet far more intense than needed, and he wants nothing more than to shut them up.

Because Tenya knows that, too. Tenya knows that he's going to represent the prospects of the Iida family if Tensei stays incapacitated [and he cannot think of him as dead or he will do something he will regret], Tenya knows he has to grow up one day—and yet, *childishly*, he can't help but think that though he will now feel the full weight of a legacy, he could've at least shared it with his brother for a little longer.

He's fifteen, yet he's gone through the USJ and the Sports Festival, however minorly impacted he was. Tensei, at thirty, cannot understand that, but this, the burden of expectation, they both know like their mother tongue. Tenya is fifteen and Tensei is thirty and he's just—

If Tenya can't handle his brother like this, if Tenya is so angry and hurt and sad and unstable from his pillar of support being taken down, then how can he be expected to hold up everyone else around him?)

Tenya cannot linger on that because Stain is alive and as long as he is alive heroes like Tensei will be killed, and Tenya's rage and hurt and confusion will not allow him to stray for long. Tenya cannot think of anyone else but Stain because dozens of mourning sidekicks and heroes have tried to take the Hero Killer down and he has hacked them down like a farmer would with wheat, yet Tenya is a child of the Iida household, brother of Ingenium, and Tenya has to believe he will be the special one to take him down because of at least one of those qualities. If he doesn't, if he doesn't *hope*, hope for his brother and hope he can kill the Hero Killer and hope he is strong enough, then Tenya won't have much else left.

Tenya breathes through his helmet. He grasps the bottom edges to adjust it around his jaw, scanning the streets again like he's done for this entire tour because he can't focus on anything else.

Manual calls for him. Tenya stopped to people-watch by accident, and as he catches up, he lies to the hero that he was just memorizing the area for the future, and tells the truth when he states that he won't be distracted again.

Carefully, Izuku plucks a small glass shard from his hair, his sleeves rolled up to cover his exposed fingers. He sighs, dropping it into the second trash bag, already threatening to burst. There's just a few more things to put into the bag, and then he can use OFA, carry the bags to the nearby dump, and then be done with all of this. ...Might need another smaller bag, though.

Izuku runs a hand through his hair before he even knows what he's doing. He grumbles incoherently, pulling it out while he walks to one of the remaining pieces of the wreckage; just a broken vase that

had a few lively flowers in it. Picking up a few of the larger shards and gathering them into his gloved palms, he continues to think like he's done for the past few minutes ever since Gran Torino left.

Has he really not hit his limit? No—should he even try to? Wasn't it better for him to grow bit by bit, considering that Izuku was given OFA despite being Quirkless? His body needed to acclimate, to adjust to whatever OFA did to work.

If he found his limits with OFA, Izuku's positive it'd end up like the end of the entrance exam: with his limbs an ugly, garish purple, bleeding and numb and unable to stop him from falling as a megalodon of a robot with a hole clean through its head fell with him. Or maybe like the end of his battle with Todoroki. Or maybe during the USJ.

He shudders, rubbing his arms to rid of the phantom pains creeping along them. There were a few white scars along his arms and legs as a reminder of his recklessness from the exam, overlapping his burn scars yet faint against the charred, wrinkled skin. They'd only increased after the USJ and the Sports Festival. Though Izuku had been filled with adrenaline at those times, the aftermaths served as a constant, quiet reminder of what would happen if he dared to continue overstepping.

Then what *did* Gran Torino mean? Was he being too reserved with how he wields OFA now? Too weary or cautious of others sharing the same fate, or maybe scared he'll almost die like he did in the Entrance Exam?

Izuku grits his teeth to anchor his shaking hands, near carelessly tossing the dirt-stained ceramics into the bag. Most make it in, though just barely, and others clatter on the tile floor.

And what did Gran Torino mean by *hesitating*? Izuku was volleying charged attacks one after the other; it's the entire reason he's cleaning up everything he's blasted away. Didn't that show that Izuku was doing the direct opposite? He rewinds what he did in the fight in his head, trying to remember every detail. The way Izuku's feet moved, the way his body twisted, the way his eyes tried and managed to stay on Gran Torino the entire time... what was he hesitating on?

Not to mention the whole admiration thing. Izuku can only assume that if Gran Torino knew Tommy, he'd reference him. (He feels his face flame; is it all really that obvious? He's been basing his style based on an amalgamation of other heroes'...)

Izuku grabs the shards of the vase that didn't land in the trash bag, this time more gentle with how he places them in the bag. He grimaces when he sees it's not going to take anything else, taking its elastic handles and tying it closed with ease.

As he goes to get another bag, he keeps thinking about his limits and hesitations. What is he reluctant to do? What made him pause so significantly in the midst of a battle that Gran Torino could point it out? Was it when he calculated where to shoot?

Izuku blinks, then frowns. Not when—he'd miss anyway. How he shot OFA didn't matter, either, because he was putting a maximum of fifteen percent in any of his limbs so as to not destroy the entire place, and even that was used sparingly. He was also fighting like he did without a weapon. The first part could be a thing for limits, but he digresses. He had to have been reluctant with *something* about using OFA, though.

He was steadfast in where he wanted to shoot and use OFA. So maybe *where* he shot it?

Izuku's frown deepens. He thinks about the fight again. Gran Torino was faster than anyone he's faced before, and OFA's blast radius was huge, so surely, the where of OFA's impacts didn't matter as much

because—

...no. No, maybe... maybe it did. Izuku keeps thinking, keeps trying to remember what his hands or legs aimed at when they shot OFA during fights. At the Sports Festival he had no choice but to aim at the head of the robot, yet for the smaller ones... he always tried to wrestle with its technology, to tear its wires out. It's why he hadn't gotten any practical points at all—Izuku was small compared to a U.A. robot, and he only had his physical self and a metal pipe.

And in the USJ, the smartest move was to aim for the waters. He never once considered trying to aim for any specific body, though. He just wanted his friends to be safe.

But what about the Sports Festival? When he fought against his friends, he never truly hit them with the ultimate prowess of OFA. Sure, Iida was constantly pushed back, but he was never *slammed* with the pure force of it until the end, only the general outskirts of the blast, just enough to keep him in the field. Izuku knew he was just using five or eight percent, something miniscule to twenty, but where had he aimed most of the time? For the legs, or for his chest, or perhaps a little off his calves? (Had he even aimed *at* him at all?)

He'd hit Iida in the face, but Izuku knew he could handle it! It wasn't much, anyway, just ten percent, and he hadn't entirely rammed his fist in like a pure punch, and—oh. "Back to limits again," he mumbles, like he's definitely done for most of these thoughts. He glances back; Gran Torino's still out.

Okay. So what about Todoroki?

...Besides the few gut punches, Izuku had only been aiming for his ice and the occasional wave of fire. He didn't really try to, to *attack* him, huh? Neither of them. Not until things got desperate, or when he couldn't drag it out any longer.

But why? He could've ended the fights easily. Could've brought so much more attention to himself, with more hero applications, more opportunities even if he'd have to choose Gran Torino anyway.

The first thing that comes to mind is that he wanted his classmates to shine, too. But that wouldn't line up with the USJ, would it? So he moves on to the second thing: that—"I... didn't want them to be as injured as me."

Izuku just... simmers on that. Because—

(—Despite being slim, the makeshift javelin rips a hole through the machine that's at least twenty times bigger than itself. The perimeters of the gap break once, twice, creating a bigger dent and then a rebounding blast of wind. The lower mechanisms of the robot explode, adding to the gale that comes after, now painfully warm. His ears ring and his chest feels like its constricting and wow, yeah, blast-force hurts.

Yet the ground came closer with all of its dents and stones and sharp edges and rough terrain and yeah, no, even with this he won't be conscious. Izuku gulps as he hears the faint cracks of his legs shifting back into place, closing his eyes and—

—Bakugo's hit lands impact right before OFA's does—glass shatters, concrete breaks, the very structure of this building collapsing in on itself as a gust of wind rushes through the middle. Heat—scorching, burning, get it off—plasters itself to the side of his face and—move, get away, get AWAY—Izuku heaves, breaths ragged and sporadic, lungs burning. His throat is dry and his skin burns, burns, burns and bleeds and flakes and he can barely stay awake. His hand that grips the staff—the

heat has melted the top and bottom off—releases its hold, letting the melted metal clatter to the ground—

—Belatedly, he thinks that quick reflexes will also doom him, because he's charged forty percent instead of the ten that he'd planned, absolutely breaking a bone and shredding his muscles at least.

It burns. It burns like a thousand ant bites all over his leg, burns like applying rubbing alcohol on a wound except the pain is tenfold, burns like an explosion that sears his skin and makes it bleed. Izuku bites his tongue, a metallic taste filling his mouth, yet he does not scream. Using the momentum, he spins, barely able to regain his footing as the dust that's picked up clears—)

(The hole in the robot, his flailing limbs, the numbed pain, the heat, searing and all-consuming, the lack of control—)

Izuku gasps like a drowning man, hands slamming over his mouth. All of that, all of that is *over*. All of that has been over for weeks, for *months*, and Izuku is okay and Tommy is alive and the robot did not kill anyone and the heat did not burn anyone and his bones are not broken and Izuku is okay. Izuku is cleaning up the interior of a place he had to destroy, one that belongs to someone who is supposed to mentor him, and Izuku is okay.

He stumbles back, trying to snuffle out the rest of his panic. Because if he doesn't, then his mind will jump to what-ifs and hypotheticals and theories like it always does, and what if he'd used one-hundred percent by accident and blasted a hole through Iida's head? What if he—he kicked too hard, if he had hit Todoroki's arm, what if Izuku shattered all the bones in it and more? It had burned for him, but he's grown used to it more and more. Yet Izuku can still remember the times *before* that increasing tolerance, and he can imagine Todoroki writhing in pain, and he can imagine Iida collapsing like that robot did, and he knows all the stares he'd get, and the fear, the terror, the disappointment and ostracization from going too far and not again, not again, he just got friends, *not again*—

"—d? Kid! Ah god damn it, I've never been good at these things—kid, just look at me for a moment," someone's saying, and they sound like Gran Torino, and his glove touches Izuku's shoulder but he can't handle that right now so he flinches away violently and god, the man was only trying to *help*, why does Izuku keep—

Something's shoved into his mouth. Izuku bites down on instinct, tear-filled eyes widening at whatever pastry filling bursts in his mouth. It shocks him out of his panic, but so does the taste. It tastes sweet, like red-bean paste. The treat in general is fresh, perfectly soft, and... really good. He focuses on its warmth, his teeth still imbedded in his first bite, and quietly, his breaths resettle back into a standard rhythm.

With shaky hands, Izuku's fingers lightly hold the rest of the treat, and he just stays there, chewing on what could only be taiyaki. "Oh, thank everything," he can hear Gran Torino sigh in relief. His vision's still blurry with tears; absentmindedly, he rubs his sleeve against his eyes to clear it all. "That works on Toshinori too, you know."

It takes Izuku an undetermined amount of time to respond. "...He has—panic a-attacks, too?"

"Not exactly." Gran Torino squats down in front of him, setting a plastic bag filled with other foods next to him. Izuku glances around. Seems like he fell on the floor somewhere in his panic. "With how thin he is, you wouldn't be able to tell, but he stress-eats. Toshinori's put you on some kind of *American Dream plan* for eating, right? He makes those himself. Always tries to eat as healthy as he can." Or maybe he can't afford to eat unhealthily with his wound, so he just tries to manage. "When he was younger, though? Oh, he was so much more jumpy! Back then he used to have panic attacks,

though I'm not sure if he does now. Anyway, if you put a—oh, I don't know, a leaf of lettuce or something in his mouth, it helped calm him down. Gave 'im something to focus on, so I thought it'd work with you."

Izuku nods, finishing the taiyaki with one last chew. Gran Torino's already handing him another, though, and with hesitance, he takes it. Sakura-flavored.

"...Wanna talk about it, kid?"

Not with you, Izuku thinks, and then immediately grimaces, so very glad he's too drained to blurt that aloud right now. Instead, he just shakes his head.

Gran Torino doesn't look bothered. "Right, then," he says, getting up. He leaves the bag of food with him, heading towards the two trash bags Izuku's filled. When Izuku frantically starts getting up, trying to say that no, no, he doesn't have to do anything, Izuku made the mess himself so he should clean it, Gran Torino shakes his head with a snort and a lopsided smile. "Just rest up, kid. I'll take these out. You aren't doubting me *now*, are you?"

Izuku scrunches his face. "...No," he manages quietly, settling back down. A few crumbs had fallen onto his costume from the movement, and he brushes them off idly.

"That's what I thought." The hero hefts the two bags up with ease before turning back one last time. "...You won't go into another one of those if I leave, right?"

Flushing, Izuku shakes his head. With that confirmation, Gran Torino shoots off, the gust from his Quirk tousling Izuku's hair and leaving him with his thoughts once more.

Ochako hasn't been able to stop thinking about how kind everyone at Gunhead agency's been ever since she stepped in.

She can't help it! She didn't know what she was expecting—okay, well, Ochako kind-of-maybe worried that Gunhead would be as stoic and tough as his name or famed martial arts style—but it wasn't... this. Not that that's a *bad* thing, just something she had to adjust to. And given that she's on a mini-tour of the agency right now, she's had a bit of time to be awed.

Ochako jolts when she hears a distant, muffled *BANG!*, whipping her head to the sound. Gunhead notices immediately, keen even when relaxed, and turns his head to the sound, too. It's down one of the halls that leads to one of the many large training rooms, and Ochako's about to bolt down it and see what's wrong, but Gunhead merely laughs softly. "That's just the people in the shooting range," he says, and Ochako blinks at him, stupefied.

"Eh? You have a shooting range?" Ochako shuts herself up immediately because *of course* Gunhead does. His Quirk is *literally* centered around shooting. Why did she ask that?

Gunhead chuckles good-naturedly. "We do," he confirms, "but it serves more as a general area to practice or train with anything that has to do with firing something instead of just guns. Though everyone here knows Gunhead Martial Arts, most of us do have projectile-based Quirks. If you wish to train there on occasion, then that's fine."

Ochako thinks about it. She *did* want to hone in on her physical prowess some more, but learning how to wield something projectile-based wouldn't hurt, right? In a situation where she isn't able to use her

hands that'd be useless, but if or when she learns the martial arts, she won't need to worry about it. Her hands being restricted would be near-impossible when she learns to wield them right here.

So she nods, straightening her head because she subconsciously tilted it in thought. (Gunhead had mimicked her head tilt, Ochako notes with an unreasonable sort of glee. That... that was really cute.) "I-I'd like that," she responds.

Gunhead nods, and if she could see his true face, Ochako has the feeling that he'd be smiling at her. "Alright then," he says, moving to the front entrance of his agency. "Shall we start a patrol?"

Koji has always been afraid of bugs. There isn't any sad backstory to it, he thinks. If there was, his parents haven't said a word and his mind's blocked it off.

Like most animals, they've sworn to not kill them, but it's very, *very* hard to not twitch when one's on him. There's just... something about the feeling of small pricks along their naturally roughened skin that will always have them on edge, maybe. Or the way they buzz around, especially when they're near their ears. Koji's skin will start to rise, and it's uncomfortable to always be on guard like they're waiting for a villain when it's just *bugs*. Sometimes, even the paranoia of one being around them is enough to trigger it. And speaking to bugs is usually hard since their responses are fizzy like TV static, or like frequencies overlapping one another, and Koji could barely discern their own words when they poke to them that one time, so he doesn't do it often.

(Sometimes, he thinks it's pathetic. Most times, he thinks *he's* pathetic. Koji has no reason to act the way he does when he interacts with bugs, like as if he's on the edge of a breakdown constantly.

Midoriya is twitchy and constantly tense, and he has several reasons for that: he's always in the heat of the moment, from the entrance exam to the USJ to the Sports Festival. He has a reason for fear. And so does Tommy, whom has bandages under his arms, visible when he fidgets with his sleeve, along with Todoroki's reserved nature alongside his scar. Even *Bakugo* has one, though Koji would also have a panic attack if he woke up in chains.

They all have *reasons*. They all have *stories* behind every move they do, behind every emotion something brings them. And yet here Koji is, terrified of bugs because they just... *are*. Bugs cannot compare to the stress of the entrance exam or the USJ, or the horror of the Sports Festival, or the threat of villain attacks that hang over all of their heads like a guillotine, and yet, *and yet—*)

So, Koji cannot stand bugs. *Maybe* being near them is fine (if they're as near as if he were to hold out a ten-foot metal pole and they were on the other side), but *on* him? No. Nope.

But Koji's also had a couple realizations ever since the Sports Festival, which have also probably been simmering ever since the USJ. The first was that they needed to get stronger, of course, but the second was that they're... actually becoming stronger mentally. As in, they might have a group of friends willing to support them now (if they can call them that), and they can handle some weapons with a confidence that they didn't know they had in them even though the thought of true bloodshed and violence still scares them.

And, well, with that strength, he'd thought... *maybe* he was ready to face his fear of bugs? Not directly, obviously, because that's too much, but with baby steps. Once he moved on from this fear, then he could tackle the violence one. He won't commit violence for as long as he can, but it'd at least help him be used to it. Give him more leeway compared to the USJ or the Sports Festival.

Baby steps. Just baby steps.

Koji had looked through the list of the general hero internships a few times, flipping back and forth between pages, trying to find one that at least knew bugs intimately. Unfortunately, few of those listed had anima-interaction-related Quirks, but one of them was centered around bugs. And that was—

"Darner, The Dragonfly Hero," the hero says with a mild American accent, gesturing to themselves with a small smile. Behind them, their wings flutter, amazingly translucent. Darner looks incredible true to her Quirk: Dragonfly. "I use she and her. Nice to meet you—Anima, right? He and they?"

Koji nods after a moment, kind of mesmerized with her appearance (platonically!). Her costume, which covers most of her form, seems to be made of something tight and flexible, but not in a way made to blatantly show it off. Rather, the colors on it look like they *shimmer*, its main sea-green and blue scheme occasionally paired with flickers of orange. Like a toned-down version of glitter, eye-catching but not gaudy. And those distracted by the colors won't notice the hidden pockets that line her form.

Darner also has a headset and visors on, with large, ovular lenses divided into multiple tiny squares, akin to the eyes of a dragonfly. They flicker between cool and warm colors, too, along with the lining of what Koji thinks are combat boots with something at the bottom.

She adjusts her visor with a wide grin. "Yeah, my costume's great, isn't it? My sister made it!" Koji recoils, flustered, because oh my god that's so *embarrassing*, they shouldn't have been staring at all! But Darner doesn't seem to mind as much as she should as she turns around, beginning to walk in some direction in a pace that makes her seem like she's running. Hurriedly, Koji catches up before his surprise leaves him staring again.

"Sorry we have to walk a *little* more; my agency's a little deeper down in Hosu because I can fly and see everywhere." She falters for a moment, seemingly knowing how Koji's falling behind and slowing down to his pace. "Everyone said it'd give me more area to cover, but personally? I think they're saying that because Hawks goes on the outskirts of the area a lot." Koji nods on instinct, resisting the urge to pull away when her wings flutter right next to him. He had to take another train to get to where Darner wanted to meet him, thankfully significantly shorter than the ride to Hosu. "Anyway! My older sister, she's a brilliant sort. Figured out how to make my vision sharper, as well as let me see red. And my shoes, she's put softeners on those so that I can be as quiet as the night! Not to mention the protective stuff she's put in—"

Sorry for staring, earlier, Koji signs after tapping her shoulder, because if they don't right now, they'll probably never be able to again.

Darner abruptly stops and looks at him, her mouth parting slightly. Then, out of nowhere, she laughs. "You're good!" She exclaims, continuing their walk. "You had no malice, don't worry. Besides, my costume's *supposed* to be entrancing. I fly much too fast for mostly anyone to catch up with, and that's especially true without the colors. Mach four, you know?"

No, Koji did *not* know. But Darner keeps moving forward, and so he's forced to follow.

With Darner's rambles, Koji can ignore her wings for a while longer—at least, until they reach a large, tall building that curves at the top like a dome. "Here we are!" The hero beams, and Koji stares at the plants that line the huge dome, at all the bugs on them specifically, and he winces despite himself. Is he really sure about this?

Darner's moved further ahead even when Koji stopped, turning around with a flourish. Though, her smile's faltered. (...Dragonflies, they can see everything around them, right? Oh god, oh god, will

Darner reject them as an intern for flinching or something? They haven't told her why they chose her, but...)

But then her smile brightens again, almost painfully so. After a mock-bow, Darner looks back up, her arms bursting out as if to gesture to the entirety of what must be her agency. "Welcome to Nature's Emporium, or the Dragonfly Agency of Hosu!"

"Worded that badly, didn't I," Gran Torino muses. He sits across Izuku, both of them on two blue armless couches.

Izuku winces but resists the urge to apologize because yeah, his advice *was* worded pretty badly even though it's probably mostly Izuku's fault he didn't understand and oh, he should've apologized but Gran Torino doesn't seem mad so? It's fine...?

Yeah. It's fine.

The old hero sighs, the sound successfully brining Izuku's focus back to him. "I *meant* that without seeing what you're currently capable of in full, you're unable to figure out ways to improve further, or even able to figure out parts you're weak in." He waves a whole piece of taiyaki around as if to encompass his point before biting down on the street snack.

"Don't get any ideas, boy!" He shouts suddenly. With his voice slightly distorted by the food in his mouth, Gran Torino's stern tone loses its power a little, but Izuku still recoils. "That doesn't mean overusing One for All to where your bones break constantly! But you use it too sparingly. Find a balance when you use it so that you're utilizing its full potential while not overdoing it."

...That makes sense, too.

"Now, what were you thinking when you spiraled?" Gran Torino prods, unabashed.

Izuku laughs nervously, scratching the back of his neck. His eyes dart around, avoidant, but when Gran Torino literally *grabs his cane* to push his cheek so that he's facing him, Izuku sighs. "I, uh. S- So when you were talking about limits and hesitance, I... I ended up thinking about how where I landed my hits affected my fights, and that led to—to what I remembered in the aftermaths of when I lost control—or when I hit my limit, b-but went *beyond* that, you know?"

His voice lowers itself, going monotone. "Broken limbs. Blood. ...Burns, sometimes, from before," he mutters. "I-In the, the USJ and the entrance exam and the Sports—Sports Festival, and... and I thought..." Izuku looks at his calloused hand. He turns it over, revealing one of his many thin, pale scars left from OFA that pokes out, winding along his index finger. He feels exhausted. "...I could kill people with this. If I was too r-reckless, I could. If I lost control, I could. I-I don't know, maybe it's something I've known this whole time. Maybe it's why—why I didn't hit Iida as hard as I could have, or hit Todoroki with my full prowess, or... or something."

"...And that's why you don't want to hit your limits," Gran Torino concludes, his cane having been lowered some time during the explanation. Silent and still looking down, Izuku nods.

They stew in that silence for a little until Gran Torino uses his cane again to reach across and tap Izuku's chin up. He feels mildly embarrassed when he realizes that there's tears in his eyes again, but Gran Torino's already seen him cry, so he shouldn't care as much. "Well, kid," the hero begins, "that *is* a valid reason. But there's also a difference between not being able to give it your all when it matters because you aren't physically able to handle it and that same thing but because of your fears.

"Villains don't wait, sir.' That's what you said to me, right, kid? Then you can't be scared of breaking limits—at least, not for long. Some villains will do anything if only to defeat you, and if they overwhelm you because you aren't willing to do so in kind, then you won't be saving lives for long."

"B-But I—I was *Quirkless*! I have no control beyond what I'm used to! What if I killed someone?!"

Gran Torino gives him an expression that makes Izuku feel like he's not getting something very obvious. "That's the point of this whole internship, isn't it? To learn control. Really, to learn more about OFA as a whole so that you can use it better. Villains don't wait, and you don't have much time to get over your fears, but you can't go and try to do so in a day. That's what I'm here for, kid. To help you grow step by step." He stretches his legs, grunting. "Once you learn, you won't kill anyone by accident because you'll be more confident in what you're doing when you break your limits. Because of that, your fear will go away."

"Toshinori was Quirkless too, you know," he adds, and—oh. Oh. "Didn't have the same side-effects as you, of course, but he gets it. He's practiced enough to where he has fine precision over OFA, but before, he was a lot less confident. Even now, sometimes, with his wound and him making you his protégé. Ask him about it." Gran Torino pauses for some reason. "...Kid? Quite a blank expression on your face."

Oh.

Izuku feels—odd. Like he should be crying more, or screaming. Or breaking something. Maybe bargaining with Gran Torino, maybe denying that it's true. But everything's so cold and heavy, and it feels like maybe his vision should be swimming from shock, or perhaps he should be passed out, but.

Nothing. There's nothing at all.

"All Might never told me that after he broke my dreams on a rooftop."

Gran Torino's eyes widen. He starts cursing, and it would've been funny had Izuku not felt so... numb. maybe he's exhausted all his tears after crying for so long. Maybe he's becoming immune to the incompetency of adults. maybe he's just over it all.

for now, he just slips into a numb place and forgets it all.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: WOOOOOOO 159K AT CH 25 LETS GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

flourish.

Chapter Notes

uhhhh immediate manga/anime spoilers !!! i think. it's about toshinori's mentor (does this count as spoiling myself if i haven't gotten to this point in canon but i'm writing abt it and taking creative liberties???)

also !! **drug use [one-time for a minor, mostly by an adult] and minor prostitution(?) tw/cw!!!!** it's also in a section entirely centered around mineta, so like. when you get to the end of ojiro's section ["When Minoru's cleaning up like this for Mount Lady..."] skip that. there's a tiny tiny tiny section at the end that's important, but yeah !! if you wanna know what happens w/o gettin into the nitty-gritty, read the italics in the a/n

anyway please enjoy :]]

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Toshinori is not a good man. Nor is he an inherently bad one, he thinks, but he knows that he's not like how mostly everyone sees All Might as. Following this, Toshinori is also not a perfect person like All Might. He's just... himself. A man. One that should've died ages ago, but a man nonetheless.

On that spring day, standing on that rooftop, Izuku had looked at him with stars in his eyes, with an admiration that leaned towards reverence in his smile. With his black hair, green highlights, freckles, and green eyes, he looked nothing like Toshinori.

But Toshinori still saw himself. Bright-eyed, youthful, looking at Nana with awe, excited that she chose him, of all people, as her student. He was treated with more respect than most Quirkless people were, maybe because of his height or his natural strength, but that never meant he didn't get scorn. Even then, Toshinori kept his ambitions and let them fuel his every move, hoping that someday, *one day*, he'd be something more than just Quirkless. If that same ambition lurked in Izuku, no matter how small, then...

Toshinori thought of himself, looking at Izuku, very much reminded about how history repeats, and then thought of what Izuku could be in the future if he said yes. A vigilante, most likely, for most hero schools didn't accept Quirkless students and he wouldn't get into U.A.'s hero course. He'd go out at night and do all he could, possibly to spite those who said he couldn't. Maybe he'd get minor injuries from minor incidents, maybe he'd never be caught at all, but he'd catch the public's eye in due time.

At that point, maybe no one would want to stop a small-time vigilante like Izuku. He'd be considered a waste of time by other bigger villains and vigilantes and heroes. All of them except for Toshinori, of course, who'd most likely end up teaching Izuku. Maybe Toshinori would mentor him alongside the next holder of One for All. Maybe he wouldn't, deciding to teach them separately. It'd be horrible drama if it got out, anyway, and he thinks about headlines that dramatize Toshinori teaching a Quirkless vigilante as much as they can.

But then someone like All for One would come along, all dominating strength and true evil and *power*, and Toshinori would be weak, his protégés not yet strong, and—

(Fire all around them, ash in his hair, heat wild and raging, All for One standing before them, unwounded, Nana with cuts that go as deep as her bones and scrapes that rend her skin off, her smile so uncharacteristically soft as it stretches the cracked blood on her face, and then her hand pushes Toshinori away desperately, weakly, and Gran Torino's tugging him further back, Toshinori writhing in his arms and don't do this, please, Toshinori had begged, reaching out more, All for One's laughter ringing around them as Gran Torino—PLEASE, let him *go*, he needs to *help*, *Toshinori has to*—blasts up in a gust of pressurized air, and they pierce the sky, Nana and All for One far below them, and no, no nO NO NO NO NO, NANA, *NANA*, **NANA**—)

(Izuku would not last a second.)

(...Toshinori should be encouraging dreams, but Toshinori, weak and miserable and just a man, is not All Might.)

—the firm "no" slips from his mouth before he can even think about it further. Toshinori adds to it a little, says something about realism, but he's clenching his teeth, words barely getting through the gaps. His mouth hurts, and he can taste blood trickling up his throat. Subconsciously, he wipes at the corner of his mouth.

Toshinori has had decades to recover, to smile in Nana's place. He'd like to think that he's moved on. But the pain, the fear—he remembers it all too clearly. It's sunk in his gut, condensed into the stitched mess that is his wound, pulsing in time with his heart. He has accepted that Nana is dead, but he will always have to breathe through the pain.

This is the greatest mercy, Toshinori had convinced himself. Izuku, bright-eyed and young and still naïve to at least most of the horrors of this violent world will not go through what Toshinori has. He will only experience the burden of being Quirkless. This is the greatest mercy.

(And yet, after Izuku forgives him, after Tommy enters their lives and Izuku gets One for All, after one day he gets the realization that Izuku does not trust him like Toshinori trusted Nana, he still thinks about it. He's always thought about it, this lingering regret, a burden just as heavy as his title of Number One.

What if that Sludge Incident hadn't happened? What would've become of Izuku, of his potential, of his drive? Would—would he still be alive?

Izuku was scrawny and fragile and Quirkless, but maybe not as naïve as Toshinori had originally thought. Toshinori may—no, *is* significantly more privileged than him, and it shows the more he thinks about it. Izuku's about fifteen, and Toshinori is quadruple that. His time, though still dominated by the Quirked, also had more Quirkless people, with some protests scattered here and there that advocated the Quirkless still being superior. Of course Toshinori's gotten the better treatment.

But now? Now, there's significantly less Quirkless people, especially in Eastern Asia where Quirks originated. In fact, Quirkless people were concentrated in the Americas last time he was there. With the strict social mannerisms in Eastern Asia, standing out with undesirable traits is the quickest way to be ostracized, and what could be less desirable than not having a power like all the others?

It leads Toshinori to this: despite having been Quirkless once, can he even imagine a fraction of what Izuku has been through? Does he even *want* to?

When he remembers the heartbroken expression on Izuku's face, his guilt exponentially grows. If Toshinori had said yes, then there would've been a huge smile there instead. And yes, maybe all the

what-ifs and hypotheticals of all the dangers Izuku would've thrown himself into would've become true, but... Izuku would've smiled then, too, wouldn't he? Maybe he'd accepted the dangers of a hero by then; maybe being Quirkless already exposed him to it all.

...What was better? Izuku being happy even if he died early, or him being devastated but safe? [Would Izuku have died early either way?]

Toshinori can't think about it. It makes him double over, his wound pulsing like a reminder, every beat like a stab of clarity to his mind that screams he is no better than a villain. "I'll tell Izuku later," he tells himself, but the lie is as empty as the disconnect between him and his student.)

Toshinori is at his house, one of many scattered around Japan when his wound acts up, when he gets the letter. He's in his weakened form, known only as "Mr. Yagi" to those around this area. The anonymity is gratifying just like it'd been when he first bought the small houses. Toshinori's seen as a kind, intriguing individual to this area, like many of the others, so when he notices the letter alongside some bills, he originally thinks it's an invite to some sort of celebration.

It's not. In fact, the stamp it has is hastily placed instead of meticulously aligned like a planned envelope would have, and the scribbles of rushed Japanese on each side are familiar. "Gran Torino?" Toshinori says in confusion, not after quickly looking around for anyone who could be listening. He frowns, distantly grabbing his bills, closing his mailbox, and heading inside his small home with his fingers itching to open the letter all the while.^[1]

There was no crudely drawn, stylized All Might face in red anywhere on the envelope, so it's not an emergency that he has to hurry to, but he can't stall on opening this. Not like Toshinori would at all, anyway, because this is the first time in a while that Gran Torino's written that badly. So, he tears the envelope open ungraciously, glancing over the first few lines of the... oddly short letter.

Yet not long after, he pauses. It's not just that the writing's shaky even for someone like Gran Torino. It's that his letters are flowing into one another, too, so haphazardly marked that it takes Toshinori a minute to decipher the Japanese, or to even remember he's reading a language. Gran Torino has never been this hurried in... all that Toshinori's known him.

The letter doesn't start with Gran Torino's standard greeting. It starts with:

You didn't tell the kid that you were Quirkless? You broke his dreams on a rooftop?

Toshinori, you've always been a blunderhead, but this is—

Toshinori clutches the letter so hard it wrinkles in his thin, shaking hands and folds in on itself, a trembling mimicry of his want to crumple it and then throw it away. He resists, instead wobbling as he sits himself on a plush loveseat, letter still in hand, and sets his free hand over his eyes. He wishes it could block his shame.

"Oh," Toshinori says to himself, despair so blatant and bitter and knowing on his tongue. "Oh, God."

Katsuki scowls, his fingers twitching as he resists the urge to claw through his hair and burn all the gel out of it. He hears a few pipsqueaks scatter, glaring in the direction of their loud footsteps. (It's a moment of reprieve from having to be so fucking stuck-up and smiley all the damn time. Best Jeanist is Number Three for a reason, and Katsuki can respect that, but that doesn't mean that he can't

hates *this*, how he has to be nice and smiling and his hair has to be in this shit style—at least, when Best Jeanist or his students are around. It makes his everything itch.)

He kicks a pebble as he walks down a sidewalk, his hands shoved in the irritatingly small fucking pockets of his jeans. It flies off, bouncing against the road as if Katsuki threw it across water for a moment before falling in a nearby road gutter. With momentary distraction gone, his scalp reminds him of how disgusting and icky the hair gel his hair was practically dumped into is, and his hand twitches again. His mom would reprimand him for being so childish, he thinks suddenly, and his mood sours even further.

His mom would do a lot of things like Best Jeanist is for this fucking internship. No, she *has* done shit like this. Used to take Katsuki on modeling trips for her and his dad's fucking fashion designs or whatever when he was younger, but when he just *couldn't stay still* in those weird fucking clothes, they stopped. That hadn't stopped Katsuki's mom from slapping the back of his head and telling him to act respectfully all the damn time, or be like this, be like that, be a little more like *Deku*, why don't he, even though the mere *thought* of that lying nerd makes him—

Instead of letting his hands ignite, Katsuki kicks another pebble. It doesn't go far, so he's able to hit it again after a few more steps forward. Imagining it as his restrictions makes his chest loosen a little more, makes him feel a little less like some model and more like a person.

He's always been like this, anyway, like whatever synonym of "angry" they stick on him now. Katsuki respects both Best Jeanist and his mom—he'd be a damn fool not to—but it fucking sucks that they're trying to contain him.

...Is that all this internship is? Just, fucking—unlearning what it means to be himself? To be restricted in how Katsuki looks and acts, all for the sake of people being less scared of him? He scowls. Katsuki can be fucking nice when it matters!

...Right? He can do that. He *knows* when to not be an asshole. He fucking does.

In the pockets of his jeans, his gloved hands shiver with irritation, because suddenly his costume's uncomfortable as all hell. Katsuki takes them out and flexes them idly, refusing to take them off entirely even as the prickles of irritation continue, crawling along his skin like fingers rapping along a desk. Of *course* he knows when to not be angry; Katsuki's not fucking brainless. (But if these people that had so many years of experience saw that his anger was wrong, if training isn't something that Best Jeanist thinks he needs to work on even when considering the USJ, then maybe—)

"Bakugo, come over here!" One of Best Jeanist's lackeys calls from somewhere ahead. Katsuki looks up, realizing that he'd stopped walking, just staring at his hands. He swallows his apprehension and ignores how heavy his head feels, instead going to the voice in a hastened sprint that only reminds him of how fucking shitty jeans are and how he hates hair gel and how wrong everything is.

Tooru looks around, her invisibility partially hiding how she's just wandering at this point. It's a pretty area with a cozy aesthetic in her opinion. The brick walls aren't something common, nor is the fancy calligraphy written on headings of shops and stores or any of the graffiti hidden in nooks and crannies, so she takes the time to observe. (If it's to avoid the eyes of everyone who notices her, whispering about "Class 1-A" and "Sports Festival" and "USJ," well. No one can blame her. Tooru may have wanted some attention when she first joined U.A., but this type makes her grateful for her Quirk.)

Her mentor wouldn't mind if she scouted this place out a little, right?

...If she's in the right area, that is.

She looks at her phone again, double-checking to make sure that she's at the right place. Yes, this should be the right address, so Tooru looks around again. ...And then again, this time frowning.

There's no out-of-place building here. Just these cute shops, a nearby park, and people milling about.

Tooru pockets her phone with a little "huh." She glances around one last time to make sure she's not missing anything before tentatively glancing to the park. She takes a few stumbling step there before walking with more confidence, her shoes making a soft crunching sound when she steps on the park's rough gravel path. Looking around, her eyes pass over some people, settling on someone with fabric skin, strings connecting their limbs, and their phone in their hand.

"Ah—excuse me?" She calls out to them, stepping in their direction. Their head perks up, briefly, before they frown a little and look back down. Tooru's gotten used to not being noticed, but damn does it still hurt.

Tooru has to walk up to them directly. "Excuse me?" She repeats, her voice raised by a smidge, and the person looks through her, then down at her floating uniform. They falter.

"Oh my God, um—sorry, were you the one calling me?" They manage, looking up and nervously smiling lopsidedly in her general direction. Tooru takes a moment to admire how cool their button eyes are before getting back on track.

Tooru nods, even though they can't see it. "I was! Sorry to interrupt your walk, but—"

"You're fine, you're fine! I was just zoning out, I should've noticed earlier—"

"—No, no, you're good! Anyway, I was just wondering if you knew where Viper's agency is...? Like, the underground hero?"

The stranger pauses, their smile faltering into something more contemplative. "Viper's?" They repeat. "Ah... I know where they are—everyone here does—but it's a little hidden."

"Hidden? Um... would you mind taking me there?" Tooru smiles nervously, lifting up her unnecessary suitcase that holds three sets of her hero gloves. "I'm supposed to be their intern for a week, so..."

"Oh!" The stranger snaps their fingers in realization, the sound more like a shift of coarse fabric because of their skin. "Hagakure Tooru! U.A. student, right? Okay, yes, that checks out. Viper's talked about you a little."

Tooru can feel her back straighten like a wooden plank. "Th-They have?"

The stranger nods. "Call me Kasuri,"^[2] they say, moving to where Tooru came from and motioning her to follow. Tooru does so a little too eagerly, her head whipping around to analyze everything she's seen around her again as she follows them around. (She's not that ignorant, though, and keeps a healthy amount of distance between them, as well as reminds herself on how she can defend herself in several ways.)

They go into a section of the area that has less people. As the two of them head deeper, Tooru finds herself looking at more and more graffiti art. They're beautiful, masterful things even though some are worn with age, their images ranging from people to things to words and created by seemingly everyone. It gives these backstreets a burst of color that Tooru finds welcoming, makes it seem less like a wasteland and more like a reminder that people have lived here.

And then, Kasuri ducks into a shady alleyway. When Tooru hesitates, they only beckon her to follow, and she really, really, *really* shouldn't give them that much trust. So she doesn't, staying outside the alleyway because she *knows* how this goes, and Kasuri gives them a smile that tells her that this was kind of a test to see if she was *that* naïve or something, and Tooru has passed.

"Kasuri speaking," they say to literally nothing. "I've found your intern, Viper."

A beat passes. Then two, three, five, and Tooru starts wondering—

"Your proof?"

—why they are here.

The new voice is velvety, though she can tell it's slightly distorted. Tooru looks around, but anyone who is around seemingly doesn't hear. Is this all from a Quirk, technology, or is that their natural voice? Why so many precautions?

"Last time I was in my office, there was a small pendulum snake. It has since been moved to yours, no doubt by yourself," Kasuri responds. Tooru blinks, her eyebrows scrunching in confusion, before—oh, Viper (if this was them) wasn't asking for Tooru's identification. They were asking for Kasuri's.

"...You'd be correct," Viper says, and Kasuri walks out with a satisfied smile. Tooru opens her mouth to ask where they're going next, but then they gesture to behind her and—holy *shit*—

Kasuri's smile grows as the shops behind her begin to ripple like raindrops falling onto a lake, blooms like watercolor paint forming in the air to reveal the tall structure of a hero agency. Three shops fade away to reveal the entrance of Viper's agency, and two more expand the length of the front. Clouds disappear (were they even there in the first place?) and part of the sky pulls away to reveal the agency's height, and dear lord, Tooru doesn't think she's ever been this stoked to learn from someone in her *life*.

"Come along," says Kasuri, and Tooru is dumbfounded and excited enough to follow without question.

When the two of them enter, it's... a burst of pure color for something so obscured from the world. No part of the agency—or, at least, the reception area—is in one singular color, blotches of energetic blues and depressing reds and acidic yellows and lively greens and alluring purples and fiery oranges splattering the walls like an artist frantically throwing every color they could onto a canvas and deciding to call it a day.

It blinds Tooru for a moment, but it doesn't take long for her to recover and approach Kasuri, who's taken a spot in front of the receptionist's desk, their arms behind their back. At some point they've taken off their shoes, their woolen feet silent against the floor.

Kasuri smiles. Behind their fabrics, stitches, and seams, Tooru wonders how much more they have hidden. "Welcome to Viper's hero agency, Ultraviolet. I'm Kasuri, one of Viper's sidekicks, and I'll be showing you around today."

Tooru chokes. "You're—you're one of their sidekicks?!" Oh *no*, did she make a good impression?!

Viper's sidekick—*Viper's* sidekick—nods. They do something behind the desk, tapping away at a device somewhere in there before stepping out with a satisfied air around them. "Registered your

name here," Kasuri says, as if they hadn't just made Tooru conscious of everything she did during their first meeting. They hand her some sort of device, and she looks at it to find the exact details on her U.A. ID card on its screen, alongside a little phrase: **one, three, one**—*never strike twice*.

"The bold letters are a knocking pattern," Kasuri explains, getting out from behind the desk. "The italics are the phrase you say. Just go to that same alleyway, do the beat, say the phrase, and voila! The agency will appear for you."

Tooru swallows, pocketing the device. "Awful lot of trust you're putting into someone you've just met, huh?" She jokes lightly.

"Well, if you had bad intentions, you would've tried something already even without knowing my Quirk, yes? I've led you somewhere alone and you've seen my back. Yet you didn't do anything. In fact, you stayed away." Kasuri keeps smiling; Tooru can tell even though they've turned their back on her again. (Maybe they trust her because Tooru wouldn't be able to handle their Quirk, whatever it is.) "Come along, now! It's tour time!"

Tooru does wordlessly, reluctance in her hero internship choice crawling up her spine. She shakes it away, because as long as she learns *something* in her time here that'll help in the future, it'll be alright.

She finds that the entire agency is colorful, vibrant, images and words and symbols jumping out of anyone who comes by. She also finds that this place is quieter than any testing room she's been in. If someone dropped a pin anywhere, Tooru could be able to hear it from miles. And it's on purpose, apparently, because Kasuri explains that the walls mimic the ones in the anechoic chamber, although to a lesser extreme. Tooru wonders why as they keep exploring, her guide pointing out training rooms, an indoor field, storage, and then where she'll stay, which—

"Ultraviolet, was it?"

Tooru yelps at the voice behind her and is plenty ashamed to admit it sounds like a banshee, only worsening with how much it echoes down the silent halls. She whirls around, her foot sliding back into a stance that gets her a laugh from Kasuri and an appraising gaze from who must be Viper. True to their hero name, they have the head, body, and traits of a viper, but it's... different.

They have webbed hands and feet, for one, instead of being a limbless snake, with a coat over their body and long pants that pinch in at their ankles. Their skin shimmers like their agency, opalescent, glittering brightly and constantly shifting as if it can't decide on one set of colors. Part of them is literally camouflaging into the background, only adding to the contrast.

Not to mention, their skin... doesn't have scales. Or, at least, Tooru can't tell if they have them because they look rougher. More bumpy, irregular in shape. And their eyes aren't like the regular split-pupil ones of a snake's, but normal circular ones. One of their irises literally strays away from Tooru to look at Kasuri, but even then she still feels like they can see through her everything.

The papers were right when they detailed their Quirk as a viper-chameleon hybrid.

"Yes, I'm Ultraviolet!" Tooru exclaims, politely bowing. Viper seems to smile slowly, revealing their fangs, sharp and glinting. "I'm your intern. She and her pronouns."

Viper nods. "You know me," they say. "He and him." The eye on Tooru snaps towards Kasuri, leaving them under his unraveling gaze. "I assume the tour is over?"

"Yes, sir. I just showed them only what's important."

"Good." His eyes go back to Tooru, who straightens her back subconsciously. "We'll be going on a patrol tomorrow. Today, get used to the agency. You'll have to be vigilant, always. Even outside of the training grounds, I'll be testing you."

And then he reaches towards a wall, lets his palm rest on it, and *fades into the background* right then and there. Tooru can't tell where he went, but Kasuri's gaze follows *something* until they look back to her.

"That's just Viper's socially awkward way of saying that you'll be jump-scared on a random basis until you learn when, where, and how he'll appear," Kasuri says. Their smile's turned amused. "This agency is all about unpredictability, surprise, and the acute awareness of every factor in your environment. I'll bet that his sidekicks will do the same for you—besides me, on most occasions. Of course, you'll learn other things besides that, but those will be the most important things."

Tooru nods, slowly. Then she nods again with a little more enthusiasm; Viper will be taking this seriously, it seems, so she'll just have to treat this like when she was learning water-boxing. And with a grin growing on her face, once she gets the hang of it, maybe this'll be fun.

Midas, the Alloy Hero, stares down at Rikido with appraising green eyes. Her hand loosely rests over the long black braid that lays around her neck and over her chest, revealing shimmering, gold-tinted scars over her pale skin. Rikido, for the nth time, rests his hand on the back of his neck self-consciously, lightly scratching. His pockets, filled with small sugar packets and sweets, burn against his thighs.

Then, the hero asks, "Why have you chosen me, Sato Rikido?"

Rikido starts. "What?"

"I said, why have you chosen me?" Midas brushes the braid back over her shoulder where it sways a little, ending at her waist. The gold streaks woven in glint in the sunlight. "Your Quirk is mostly for attack. You have used it mostly for attack, as far as I could tell. You are made for brute force. Yet, surely you know who you've chosen?"

"Yeah," Rikido says, scratching his neck again. He lowers his arm, self-conscious, only to bite at his cheek lightly. "I know. You're a support hero, right? Can manipulate metals, usually gold, to make shields, weapons, and anything you need... Right?"

Midas nods, still staring. "You've not answered my question."

"Ah. It's..."

It's a multitude of things.

The start of school was months ago that felt like years, what with everything that happened so far: the Battle Trials already stirring up bad blood, the USJ creating trauma, the Sports Festival giving them all an innate fear of what's to come, and these internships. These things, despite the hero internships keeping the class apart, have also brought their class closer, too. Their class is the only one who's been through these things fresh out of middle-school despite 1-B being a hero course as well.

But that hasn't stopped Rikido from feeling inadequate as soon as he stepped into Class 1-A's classroom.

It's just. His Quirk, it only buffs him up if he eats sugar. People look at 1-A and they remember Midoriya who can break buildings with a punch, or Bakugo who was the "winner" of the Sports Festival, or Todoroki with his heritage, or the rest of his peers with their unique qualities. Most of the time, Rikido is genuinely just a man who literally gets strong only when he's on a sugar high.

If he tells the others, they're obviously going to try and comfort him or something, say how that doesn't matter to them and such, probably. And he knows that! He really does. Those words wouldn't just magically wash away these insecurities, however.

He and Kirishima or Ojiro bond over it, sometimes, after school. About how simple their Quirks are. And for both of them, those words *do* hurt, giving them a downtrodden look that Rikido's learned means nothing but self-depreciation if they focus on it for too long. He always takes out some of his pastries made by his own specialized recipes for them when everything in their head gets too much, letting his friends eat them to relax for just a moment.

But when he isn't focused on Kirishima or Ojiro's self-esteems, Rikido's focused on himself, acutely aware that the only thing his classmates may know about him is his Quirk. Kirishima has his friends, Ojiro has Hagakure and some others, but Rikido... kind of has himself most of the time? Which is fine for him, but it's left him thinking more often than not.

Specifically about how if he'd done something wrong in the USJ, maybe Rikido could've died since all his Quirk does is just enhance his strength. Kirishima can deflect bullets and weapons with his skin, and Ojiro can use his tail to dodge or hit others unexpectedly, but Rikido... He doesn't have that luxury. Doesn't have animal traits either, nor can he break through walls with a touch or control explosions or manipulate fire and ice. He can only build off of what he has now and start expanding on or beginning whatever he can to help others.

So for this internship, he's decided to do just that. Maybe he'll always doubt his uniqueness compared to everyone else, and maybe that'll affect him later on or something, but ultimately? None of that will matter. He doesn't care much as he should because Rikido's had his entire life to come to terms with his plainness, and he won't start caring about how he is compared to others *now* because he's joined a hero school. Rikido just wants to *help*, and he can't do that when he can't even help himself.

But Rikido doesn't say all of that to Midas. Of course he doesn't. Instead, he laughs a little sheepishly, admitting, "You can both attack and defend. I can only attack, like you said. I'll get myself harmed eventually if I keep going like that, you know? So, I just... wanna learn how to do both, like you do?"

Midas smiles, then, a small sliver of a full thing. "Smart," she praises, but it's said so plainly Rikido doesn't know if she's mocking him or not. She turns around, beginning to walk away with purpose (is she—is Rikido hallucinating, or are those heels?) until she turns around. "Well? Follow me." Midas says. "Let's do a little patrolling while we're here, and then a trip around my agency."

Rikido grins and catches up, hope fueling his every step.

Mashirao probably has most of his weaknesses covered, he thinks.

Aikido is something he's always been immersed in at a young age, even before his tail got as long as it is now. It's one of the more less-violent martial arts, something that Mashirao can both attack and defend with without harming whoever he was fighting too badly. With time, he's become pretty proficient at it, learning how to use it in perfect balance alongside his tail.

His tail can handle anyone just out of reach and center his balance or act as another arm if he has more than one opponent. It used to be shorter and weaker, more prone to injury—Mashirao had even broken it, once, while practicing in his old dojo. But now the outside's calloused and rough, his skin layering in on itself constantly until it became thick and tough enough to withstand Mashirao throwing someone down with it.

Now he just has to deal with long-range attacks. And maybe, one part of Mashirao's mind whispers, something to do with his plainness.

Mashirao feels his tail flinch. His own steps falter for just a second, but he hastens his pacing as Snipe continues to speak ahead of him.

His classmates don't mean it in a rude way when they call Mashirao "plain" offhandedly. He knows that. Other people have called him that, too, and he's gotten used to it over the years. It just... hurts. Mashirao's called them out on it once or twice, told them to stop, and they have—but the rest of U.A. certainly hasn't.

He hears it down the halls as they walk to the cafeteria and in the mornings when he's making his way to class. People look at Mashirao, at how—normal he looks, and they whisper about where he's going, about if he's in support or something, and *oh, wait, isn't he in the Hero course? 1-A, right? Really? But he looks so...*

...plain. Mashirao knows. If he covers up his hurt and accepts it a little more, then maybe that plainness, in itself, is one of his own unique traits.

Either way, one of his few comforts is this: Mashirao's *plain*, but he's *efficient*. That matters more than anything. (And then he thinks, Eraserhead's like that, too, isn't he? So why is *he* considered cool, but Mashirao was made fun of?)

"You alright, kid?"

Mashirao startles, his body twisting towards Snipe as his tail twitches with the effort to not whip back. "Yeah," he says on reflex. "Yes, I'm fine, sir. Why?"

"*Right*," Snipe draws out, clearly not believing him but letting it slide. One of the longer guns he has is aimed down, muzzle to the floor, and the hero has a strong grip on the barrel. "Just need your full attention right now, because before we do anythin', we're gonna go over some gun safety rules. Don't want people gettin' blasted in the head or chest by accident. And first thing's first: don't ever, *ever* aim a gun at somethin' you want to keep in-tact. I'd say to always aim it at the floor if you're not going t' use it, unless you've got the muzzle covered..."

When Minoru's cleaning up like this for Mount Lady, the goddess of a hero usually keeps quiet as he works, only rambling about some gossip or piece of news whenever she wants an opinion that agrees with hers. Minoru isn't one to fill these kinds of silences, so he doesn't. Instead, his mind gives him reminders of when he was cleaning just like this, before... before.

It was when Minoru's parents officially hadn't had time for him anymore. He isn't sure when, but it must've been a gradual thing, one that left Minoru with a two-story house to himself with the only reminders that they existed being the photos on the walls, their separate rooms, and how they still paid for his school lunch. Minoru isn't sure when he stopped caring for them, either.

~~As a kid, one of the logical things to do was to clean the house in hopes that they'd come back.~~

As a kid, one of the logical things to do was to hang out with friends. But the thing is, ever since Minoru's Quirk manifested, he hadn't had any. His hair couldn't act like a puppeteer and manipulate things like the girl a couple of rows away from him. His hair couldn't grow as sharp as a cactus' needles and pop anything with a hollow interior like the boy in front of his desk. His hair could only pop off his head in a fit of emotion and stick everything to the walls, turning into an annoyance when they stuck on forever since he was having some sort of tantrum. (*"Always crying like a widdle girl,"* some of his older peers had mocked. *"Short as one, too. Look at how weird he is!"*)

So, the other thing he could do was explore outside of the house once he knew every crevasse of the inside. And Minoru did, armed with only a snack pouch and a water bottle.

He hadn't gotten far before something interested him, however: a man in a one-story house smoking. Or maybe he had a bong? No, that was at his side, shining in the late-afternoon sunlight and absolutely captivating Minoru, who hadn't seen something like it before. When Minoru approached, the man gave him a yellowed, gap-toothed smile.

And that was how Minoru met Keisuke, a man who sounded decades older than he looked, at nine years old.^[3] (He knows those drug presentations tell everyone to stay away, but Keisuke looks at Minoru with a smile and offers a small cigarette to him, and Minoru, who has only received jokes wrapped in gifts, can't resist accepting. He only tries it once and doesn't like the burn, but that doesn't stop him from coming back to Keisuke and remembering comfort as the scent of cigarettes.)

Minoru keeps coming back for years. Mostly, they sit in silence just like he is with Mount Lady, minding their own business, except Minoru has never hated doing this in his life. Sometimes, when she's too engrossed in her public image, Minoru closes his eyes and imagines that he's back in Keisuke's shoddy home, the man sitting on a worn armchair with some greasy food by the side.

Because Keisuke knows places where the greasiest American food is served, and he knows what the most degenerate animes are—has a collection of them, even. Keisuke has told Minoru of his trips across the Japan, and eventually, outside of it, from France ("Has the best bitches, I'll say," he says) to the Americas ("Absolutely filthy, the U.S.," he smiles), and even gives him some souvenirs as proof. (Keisuke has women over, sometimes-becoming-most-times, and Minoru learns to leave until tomorrow or at least bring a set of headphones and let the women leave on their own late into the night.)

Keisuke is the first person to give him something when he gets high grades on his report cards; the first time, Minoru was given a couple hundred bucks. Keisuke gives him unhealthy chips, snacks, and candy so sweet Minoru gets a toothache hours after the first time he tries some. Keisuke has a PlayStation and Xbox with a few games on it that Minoru was allowed to play on (even Smash Bros.) Keisuke had told him not to bother with cleaning his house as payment for all he's done for him, instead shoving a controller in his hands with a lopsided smile and demanding that they play.

The first thing Keisuke says when Minoru tells him how his Quirk works is, "Damn, that's going to be kinky in the bedroom." The second thing? "You're lucky, kid, that your Quirk isn't like mine."

(Minoru doesn't ask what it is, simply because it's the first time he sees Keisuke stare at his cigarette packets with something like hate.)

And then, one day, Keisuke puts his half-finished cigarette out—which he never does—and asks: "Y'wanna have fun, kid?"

That day, Minoru is taken to a stripper's club for the first time, and most definitely not the last. He loves it.

(Minoru doesn't want to lose someone who accepts all these nasty, pathetic bits of himself, so he swallows his bile and watches. Eventually, after years of exposure, he learns to thrive.

Turns out, someone like him who knows the nastiest places in town is popular in middle-school.)

"Ugh—can you *believe* this?!" Mount Lady scoffs suddenly, waving her phone in the air, and when Minoru takes a glance at her, he forgets his trip down memory lane and works with new vigor.

Izuku wakes up.

Chapter End Notes

MINETA SECTION SUMMARY: basically, mineta stumbles upon a very bad influence due to his parents being neglectful, but because said influence is the only nice one, mineta becomes who he is now. hope i made him somewhat redeemable, for those who read the section. i hope i made toshinori redeemable, too agjaeghae,,,,,

gran torino has a letter from all might the first time he's like, actually shown (?), so i've assumed that he's just refused to get a phone and instead only uses letters to communicate long-distance [\[return to text\]](#)

kasuri is dyed japanese fabrics woven specifically to make a pattern (at least, according to good ol' wikipedia) thought it was fitting. [\[return to text\]](#)

keisuke means "save." do with that what you will [\[return to text\]](#)

also kasuri doesn't care abt gender, they go by any pronouns

time's up.

Chapter Summary

oh no

Chapter Notes

sorry for the shorter chapter. this kinda,,,,, felt like a natural stopping point,,,,,, BUT that does guarantee the next will be like double the size or smth, maybe over 10k if i can stretch it lol

i kept falling asleep or getting distracted while writing lol,,,,, but hey!! this is still two chapters in a month, so!!

anyway !! hope you're well-fed, hydrated, and comfy as you read !! (i've said that to my wattpad readers like every chapter but didn't here because ao3 just has a different Vibe but !! friend told me to be more open here so yeah ahkfajgjea,,,,,, will try to be)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku wakes up, and the world feels off-kilter. He's—somewhere, sitting on something... When his fingers feel around a little, he finds he's on a mattress of sorts. Or a couch? When the fog in his head clears a little more and everything feels a little less underwater, Izuku looks at everything in front of him again. Yes, he's on a blue couch, his body covered by a blanket and at an uncomfortable angle that has him laying down more than anything, he's in Gran Torino's living room(?), and it smells like taiyaki and coffee.

Izuku scrunches his nose, recollecting his scattered memories and thinking back a little.

...Oh.

Oh, that's so *embarrassing*—

"No getting up for you, kid!" Gran Torino orders from somewhere to Izuku's side before he can even do anything besides flush. He startles, head whipping towards the noise, and it takes him a little longer to process that Gran Torino's eating. ...Again? Wasn't he getting lunch when he...

Izuku scrambles up only to get whacked lightly by the end of Gran Torino's cane. He winces but holds himself up determinedly, craning his neck to the side painfully with his eyes focusing on his mentor. His cheeks are still flaming, too, and God, all of this is no-good and bad and *horrible*. "How—How long was I o-out?" A few minutes, please?

"A day or two," Gran Torino says casually, and Izuku recoils like he's been physically struck, swallowing what probably would've been a quiet cry. That's so much time wasted! Izuku has to—he

can't reach whatever limits Gran Torino wants to see at this rate, he—"villains don't wait," he'd said, but here they are, doing nothing because Izuku couldn't handle—

Gran Torino pushes his neck with his cane. Limply, Izuku lets his head fall, now staring up at the ceiling. With a burst of air, the hero's looking down at him, face darkened by shadows. "Health first, always," he states. "'Health' includes mental health, too. Think about it like this: what use are you if you do that—dissociation thing on the battlefield? What will you do if your mental state dips mid-fight? No use is what you'll be, *'specially* when you're handling One for All *and* your limits. You need to be in the right headspace."

Mutely, Izuku nods, sighing silently when a tray of dango is set on his chest. He shifts himself so that his upper body's sitting up, biting into the skewered rice dumpling. Gran Torino hops off the couch and sets a glass of water on the table, too.

After Izuku gulps down some water, he slumps, feeling a sudden, faint heaviness weighing on him. This calmer atmosphere... Izuku can't handle it. There's nothing to focus on besides the remaining dango and water, but his mind is always running, always *thinking*, so it'll only be a matter of time until he thinks of All Mi—

"So wha-what's going to happen now?" Izuku blurts out, tucking away his rage and numbness. He's still wearing his costume so he picks at its sleeves, fingers trailing along its neon-green stripes. "I-I'm... Is this... a break? Are we n-not gonna be training today?"

Gran Torino, eating the last of his beloved taiyaki, pauses, chewing thoughtfully. "Well," he starts, partially distorted, "you'll be taking as long as you need to feel decent again. Then, afterwards... I *guess* you can train a little, keep it light." He swallows, drinks some water from his own glass. "Outside, there's an abandoned area down a few roads. So, we'll either go there or to the dump to figure out whatever you can truly do. But that's only when you've recovered!"

Izuku grimaces. "But I'm alri—"

In a burst of air, Gran Torino launches at him. Izuku flinches, hard, before clumsily pressing into the back of the couch to dodge. His hair stands on end, a sudden chill spreading near his shoulder from where Gran Torino aimed his sudden kick. That could've been dislocated, or worse, *fractured*.

And that attack was... slower. In fact, Gran Torino's able to slow himself down gradually instead of in a sharp burst, gracefully landing on his feet somewhere in front of Izuku. Nothing gets destroyed, only grazed by a soft breeze.

The retired hero scoffs at him. "Are you, now."

"Okay," Izuku concedes, going back to his previous position with a miserable sigh. "Okay. I-I see what you mean." There's a pause, and then, "So... what do I do in the meantime?"

Gran Torino taps his foot in thought. "How about we go out a little into the city, eh?" He says. "Let you get a grip of things, do some PR, see what to look for and how other heroes do things, yada yada." Gran Torino smiles. "You're gonna watch the *real* horrors of heroism; that is, the *attention*."

Despite his words, the retired hero's smile isn't a deadly or sadistic thing. It has the edges of mirth tucked into its corners. And inexplicably, Izuku relaxes just a margin and thinks that things might actually be alright for now.

Tommy is so, so fucking tired right now, but he's also never felt more alive.

Somewhere around this mess of shrapnel and soot, Hatsume laughs maniacally, with a faint scrape like flint-and-steel being struck following soon after. A boom rattles the support department's testing area a little, startling some of the other students here, but there's no sound since Hatsume's long developed a silencer for these new babies of hers.

(He doesn't think it's a coincidence that there's no intentional or accidental loud explosions anymore, especially when Hatsume introduces him to hundreds of thousands of nanomachines that cover the walls and "suck any loud sounds" out of the room. *Specifically* because they were *not* there when he first entered. Did she just—have those nanomachines on-hand, or somewhere in storage? Or did she develop them in one night? Tommy fears both of those options.)

Her babies? Oh, those are just the fireworks that were in Tommy's server but Hatsume version. That thud that's followed this test round was *not* normal, though, and it has him sitting up, agitating the goggles around his eyes and the grime plastering his skin. His hands, shaking after hours of being surprisingly steady, set down his tools on the workbench delicately, barely careful in not messing with any wiring he was working on while he gets up.

Tommy doesn't need to call out for Hatsume or anything, though. She bursts out the training room herself, colored smoke and embers wafting through the open door, and practically runs to him like an animal. Her dreadlocks are their own canvas, spurts of random colors she'd put into the rockets, and—oh, Prime, why are her teeth *stained* a little?

"It worked!" She squeals, having skid to a stop like right in front of Tommy. Her hands wave around, going from reaching to him to tugging on her hair. Her entire body is giving Tommy an energy boost. "It worked it worked it worked it *worked*, Tim-Tom!"

Hatsume picked that nickname up after one of her caffeine highs, and hasn't stopped using it since. Tommy abhors it. "The fuck're you on about?" He asks with a genuine yet incredulous smile.

"The—y'know, the enhancements! The boosts! The—I slammed into the roof!" She says it all with far too much excitement.

"Hatsume." Tommy half-bemoans, half-laughs, entirely surprised-but-not. "*Hatsume*."

"I told you to call me *Mei*, Tims! It doesn't hurt anyway! I cushioned the floor and the roof, don't worry! That's one of my other babies I haven't shown you yet: my perfect Pillow Plushies! But never mind that, Tim-Tom; I was able to hit the roof! That's like—oh I have no idea, but the room's, like, as tall as a cathedral, so that's something!"

"That—" Tommy sputters. "Okay, one, we've only known each other for, what, a few days? Two, you being cushioned doesn't fucking make things better because it was hard enough to make a thud even I could hear in this room? Are you alright? You've been in there for hours."

Hatsume huffs, crossing her arms petulantly. "Call me by my first name and I'll tell you."

Tommy smirks, mimicking her pose. "Answer my fuckin' question and I won't tell Maijima that you're stalling to get help."

That gets her standing ramrod straight, eyes locking onto him in a panic. "You wouldn't."

"I fucking would and you know it."

Hatsume sighs, defeated, while Tommy grins triumphantly. "Okay, okay! I... *may* have been a tad careless in excitement. Just a *tad*, just by a *smidge*; it's nothing serious! I was wearing my protective clothes, too! Just, I... Fireworks are hot, right, and the AC wasn't fast enough, and if I manually decreased the temperature there could've been a huge reaction between the fireworks' heat and the sudden cold like with Todoroki during the Sports Festival and... okay, that might also be an excuse but—but the point is that it was hot! So I kind of... rolled up my sleeves, and got a small burn there?"

Tommy's smile falls. "A 'small' burn?"

"A small burn," Hatsume repeats. She pulls up her sleeve to reveal a patch of inflamed skin that sprawls over her forearm, stark against her usual tanned tone. It's nothing extremely serious, thankfully (maybe that's what she meant by "small"), but it's large and still something to worry about. Tommy stares at it with pursed lips, and then at her with an "are-you-shitting-me" expression before moving to get the med-kit usually stored nearby. Fortunately, it's in its usual spot, so he takes it out, hearing Hatsume shuffle herself with an audible pout so that he can bandage her "small burn."

As Tommy prepares a wet cloth from a nearby sink, Hatsume starts talking again. "The fireworks as they are now can probably boost our prototype elytra hundreds of meters in the air at best, I'd think," she says. "Still has lots of room to improve, of course, but our progress is banging so far." Tommy falters at the slang, looking at her with a stifled giggle, before putting his focus back on her arm. "And! A shipment of ripstop nylon's come in, so I'll have Hana infuse that with some other nylons plus Kevlar, some polyesters... She might be able to make it look like 'elytra wings,' too. Veiny, thin, basically like dragonflies, right? Also, how's the body going?"

What the fuck's a dragonfly? ...Oh, he'll figure it out later; Tommy nods along. He's lightly tapped a wet towel on her burn, already applying a thin sheen of aloe vera just in case. "Elytras are just way fucking cooler," he states, wiping the excess plant paste on his hands. He'll wash it off soon. "And the frame's doing fine. 'Ve been sealin' up some of the, uh—the scales? Whatever those fucking curved sheets are. Anyway, I've been sealing the gaps between those with that tool you taught me to use. Y'know, that small hot iron thing."

("A welder," Hatsume says. Tommy waves her off.)

"I think I've got like, thirty percent of it done? The main frame, that is; the wings, not at all. Was moving the wires around for the LEDs and the jetpack mechanics earlier." Tommy unrolls the bandages, wrapping the end around her forearm before winding the fabric up Hatsume's arm. "Fuckin' sucks that I can't, like, craft meticulous shit like all of that, but whatever. Anyway, you sure that the metal's resistant enough to take anything?" He'd have said netherite, but Hatsume hadn't known what that was.

"Positive!" She chirps. "Power Loader let me blast a makeshift rocket launcher I made at it once, before he melted it. I also had Snipe shoot at it with all *sorts* of guns, too. Whenever Michi's involved in metalwork, he doesn't half-ass anything. Thanks, Timmy-Tom!"

Tommy finishes her bandages with a bow. "That's fucking poggers," he says, watching Hatsume immediately start moving her arm around. "Nothing less for an elytra. And *don't* fucking hurt yourself again." With a distracted nod, she bounds off, a grin plastered on her face like usual.

Tommy sighs, leaning back. Without something to do, his fingers latch onto his sleeves, fiddling with the now-fraying ends. He kind of wants to keep melding the elytra frame an' shit, but he also hasn't taken a break in Prime knows how fucking long, besides for eating and sleeping and whatever else.

His eye darts to where he knows his communicator is latched to his hip.

In the length of the internships thus far, Tommy's texted Izuku a fair (well, a shit ton) of times. And, well, so far... he hasn't gotten a response. None of his messages have been seen, either, which gives him more fear than anything, because what if Izuku can see Tommy's messages on his phone? Either something's really, really wrong, or he's just busy. Or he—left.

...Izuku wouldn't. He thinks. (But how would Tommy know?)

Yeah, Izuku wouldn't.

It's fine, it's all fine. It is. It is, it is, it is. They've been friends for over a year(!!!), and last time this shit happened, Izuku was—close to death. But he's with heroes, and all the danger his gut screamed about is centered on Iida. It—it's probably shitty that Tommy's being glad about that, but he is because it means Izuku's safe. Tommy should stop being a fucking wuss. (That does little to discourage the sorrow building on his shoulders.)

Tommy is the Biggest Man Ever, and Tommy wasn't defeated by Dream, and Tommy's survived isolation and exile and war. This—this attachment, this *dependency*—he can't be defeated by something like this. Like something as small as who leaves him. He should be used to it anyway. It's not going to hurt. (It's going to gut him.)

So Tommy texts Izuku a quick message, something like "we're doing the coolest fucking shit here" that's plenty open-ended, sets his communicator back on his hip, and goes back to working on the mechanized elytra frame.

Momo's gotten accustomed to feeling quite insignificant over her time at U.A. Not that U.A. is the cause of it, no, just... intensified it. And it's not her classmates' faults, or her teachers', or anyone's, really—just her.

Yes, her Quirk is strong, but she hasn't achieved much with it besides in the USJ. Sure, with the training Aizawa's given her and what she's observed from Tommy, Momo can put up a better fight than most. But she hasn't... done anything, besides protect her friends in a life-or-death situation. Like what everyone else was doing.

Momo just—she wants to do more. And with the hero internships, she thought she could.

But here she is, Kendo Itsuka next to her, watching their supposed "mentor" do the second photoshoot scheduled today. Or third? When Momo looks down at the clipboard again, she nods to herself; this is Uwabani's second. These photoshoots all feel the same.

Because honestly? PR is mostly what they've been doing the entire week thus far, and though she still holds optimism, Momo finds it fading, and fast. Going back and forth between buildings, taking pictures, watching Uwabami model constantly... she teaches them more about holding appearances than actual training. Wasn't that the whole purpose of the internships, to become better *heroes*?

...Momo winces at the bitterness of her thoughts. She doesn't mean to be! It's just, she's *tired* of doing the same thing, and Kendo is, too, because they're both restless and Kendo keeps looking outside as if it'll suddenly be the next day and they're going to do *something*.

Maybe this'll prepare her if she's famous...? Or if she doesn't know how to—she doesn't know, increase her fame?

Fiddling with the fabric of her improved costume, Momo looks up, locking gazes with Kendo. The other shakes her head, muttering, "The photographer wants a few more pictures." Silently, Momo sighs, looking at Uwabami who's posing with a seductive expression. Kendo pats her shoulder in sympathy.^[1]

Looking at her mentor's little-to-no hesitation in switching poses, it makes Momo think. Is it—is the point of going to all of these photoshoots centered around their appearance? As in, their reputation? Does Momo have to use her appearance to her benefit? Is this a vital part of being a, a *developed* female hero, to—to flaunt herself so... so *sexually* for the sake of profit? Surely it can't be, that isn't logical.

But then, why is Uwabami spending more time posing than helping others? Why is Midnight's outfit the way it is? Why does Mount Lady act as she does? ...Why was Momo's first costume even permitted, what with how thin the fabric was or the way it was designed?

...She sighs again. Kendo looks at her worriedly, but Momo just smiles at her reassuringly. Hopefully it looks reassuring, anyway. She gets another comforting hand on her shoulder regardless, and this time, it stays.

There's worth, being here. There has to be. Momo only has to wait. (And if nothing happens, if she and Kendo are stuck as dolls for Uwabami to prance around with, well. Momo has Aizawa and Tommy for the year, if not until 3-A—she'll learn how to train herself and Kendo when push comes to shove.)

When Tsukauchi leaves, Toshinori deflates from his stronger form, rushes to the bathroom, and hurls. His blood stains the white toilet and the clear water and the white tile floors a vibrant yet dark red, as if it's holding all of his rage. He'd hurled soon after he first defeated All for One, too, and it was just like this except his gut was—

As if reminding him it still exists, Toshinori's wound writhes and pulses like a parasite. He coughs, shaking, hunching further in.

Toshinori thought that man was dead. Toshinori thought he had more time if he wasn't. But—now, of all times, when his relationship with his student is so... fragile?

"Nana," he whispers. "Oh, Nana. I'm so, so sorry."

Manual's gaze pinned Tenya down like a butterfly with bolts in its wings. It had a façade of nonchalance in it, as if he were just talking about the weather. But the question he just asked—no, the accusation he stated—rings in Tenya's head with no malice: "You're looking for the hero killer, aren't you."

Are Tenya's plans so obvious that Manual's already figured him out?

Tenya clenches his teeth underneath his helmet, thankful that Manual can't see his eyes as the hero goes on a monologue. Tenya tunes out part of what he says in favor of quiet his anger down. It bubbles up constantly when he's able to recognize bits and pieces of this speech because of how frustratingly *ignorant* Manual is.

Manual is so utterly carefree about it all that it drives Tenya mad. How can he just—*dismiss* his rightful anger like this? Tensei, his *brother*, is in the hospital, *paralyzed*, needles in his skin and just

barely living, and Manual has the *audacity* to tell him to do *nothing*?! Tenya can't *possibly* stand by, even if Manual says there's regulations and rules for a reason. For once, people are right when they say that some rules are meant to be broken.

(And what is he supposed to do with his sorrow? Tenya is a legacy, so he cannot show open vulnerability. But this rage, it courses through his veins like a storm, lightning electrifying his nerves, dragging all it can into its wrath. It charges his blood to where he might explode, yet underlying it, all that is there is just—pain.

How does one deal with pain of this magnitude? How does one deal with grief for someone who isn't gone? [There is no "yet" there, and will never be one so long as Tenya breathes.]

How can anyone just make it all so simple and *move on*?)

Unlike what Manual is saying, Tenya isn't using his Quirk for himself. Tenya is a brother, Tenya was about to—and still can—be an only child, Tenya is one of the two only Iida family legacies, and Tenya was born in a family line of heroes. If he can't give justice to his brother, (if he can't use what he has or what he's learnt to help), then he is *nothing*.

...Tenya bows, anyway, gritting a "thank you for the warning" through his teeth, and continues to walk with Manual.

18:46

<loveable cockroach> OH GO D IM SORRY FOR JNOT RESPONDING I AHD MY PHONE OFF AND LOTS OF STUFF HAPPENED ORZ LET ME QUICKLY READ THROUGH EVERYTHING

[MESSAGE DELETED: <big man> You didn't leave]

<big man> Fucking finally

<big man> What does ORZ mean

<loveable cockroach> orz is like, an emoticon for bowing i guess? like the O's a head, the R's a torso + arms, and the Z's the legs...

<loveable cockroach> anyway! the reason i'm responding now is because i'm on a bullet train to shinjuku (i think?) gran torino's reading with me by the way; he says hi

<big man> Tell him that event hough he's old he's more kickass than you

<loveable cockroach> HEY!! >:[

<loveable cockroach> i mean true but STILL

<loveable cockroach> ... he says "damn straight"

<big man> I'm never wrong

<loveable cockroach> ANYWAY. we're gonna pass hosu, which is where iida probably is. i'm gonna check on him if i can.

<loveable cockroach> we can talk about it, by the way. i kind of filled gran torino about the iida situation since this ride's real long and he probably needs to know, as a hero and all

<big man> ...Alright

<big man> Wait

<big man> How do you know Ida's in Hosu

<loveable cockroach> because manual's agency is in hosu? it's also where stain got ingenium

<loveable cockroach> which is why iida's there, i think

<big man> Holy shit thag's so fucking brainless of him, thank Prime I gave him ambrosia

<big man> Nedzu told me he told the other heroes to be alter an' shit

<big man> *Alert

<big man> But I'm still feeling shitty so their sirveilance or whatever is probably fucked

<loveable cockroach> *surveillance! and i'll bet that no matter what any heroes do, unless iida's physically restrained or something, he'll find a way to stain. that is, if he's iida's true purpose for interning with manual. there's so much *for* it, but it could still be up for debate?

<big man> That word yeah

<big man> And I agree w all that other shit too

<loveable cockroach> gt's said that if he sees iida, he'll look out for him, too.

<loveable cockroach> BUT NO MORE SERIOUS STUFF!! let me respond to all of your previous messages before anything, alright?

<loveable cockroach> because first and foremost: what is that *monstrosity* you and hatsume made in the first pic ??? that can't be, like, one of her patented products, right ????? *right* ??????

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Shut up Shut up Shut up
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Shut up Shut

"Kurogiri, bring out the Nomus.
You think *you* can
GET AWAY WITH

STabbing me?
If I want to **kill**
you.
I just **will**. That's all.
*It'll be a **WILD CONTEST.***"

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IT HAH4HAH4AHAS COME

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ill
i don't want to h urt
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they can't make th1 111s hurt

Coward. Coward.
Stopscreaming

i know. i know. i don't. i know.

LET US OUT
L3T ME OUT
I WILL RAZE
EVERYTHING
TO
the
Ground.

All hell breaks loose, Izuku thinks, when a Nomu slams into the train.

Chapter End Notes

1. you can imagine this however you want, but basically, her costume's become a lot less fanservice-y while still providing her lots of uncovered skin as well as practicality (and a cape! she has a cape, because how ?? was she not cold all the time ?????). i've drawn a thing in my art book on wattpad, but you can interpret how she looks with the prev. sentence(s?) in mind. [\[return to text\]](#)

see you next chap :D

endure.

Chapter Notes

lots of violence in this one + graphic depiction of wounds/injuries. please be careful while reading, and take breaks whenever you need to.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Smoke rises from an area blocked by just a couple buildings. Though the fumes are dark enough to blend in the night sky, the flames themselves highlight it, outlining the tops of buildings. It's... oddly hypnotic, and Tenya can't seem to look away. Standing there, practically para—*frozen*, Tenya blinks once and he's standing in the USJ, his loose grasp on hero basics suddenly worthless in the face of tragedy.

"No, no—I can tell a villain appeared, I've got their location. See if you can record their Quir—ah? They're not... human?" Manual keeps talking to his radio in his headphones, lowering his voice near the last part. It rises again when he says, "Just keep watching, stay on the line, and relay *everything* you can to me! I'll be there in a moment!"

His head snaps over to Tenya, who get out of his trance of just... staring at the smoke and fire. He does so just in time to hear Manual order, "Tenya! We're going back to the agency right now! Stay with me—when people run, don't lose me in the crowd!"

Tenya runs. But he does not end up at the agency.

Because he does follow Manual, his legs revving up, prepared to truly run if needed. He weaves past a few people, some panicked, others still shocked, and then his eyes take the briefest glance down a dirty alley. It's dark, and Tenya would've been barely able to see anything... had it not been for the night vision he'd asked to be installed in his helm. And in that alley, he sees the briefest glint of metal, a hint of bloody red—

He's turning before he knows, it, dashing forward like this alley is the exit to the USJ. And in some ways, it is; both led to the end of something, after all. And today, Tenya will make sure that the "something" happens to be *Stain*.

So it's no surprise he doesn't hesitate to swing a leg at the Hero Killer when he sees him.

It's deflected with infuriating ease. Tenya's glasses fly off, cracking on the ground somewhere, lenses surely broken while the world turns into a smudge. But his rage, it courses through like an unstoppable force, and what does it matter that Tenya can't see too far? He can still see stain in all of his ugly, wretched glory, and that will be enough when Tenya *gets him*—

He staggers to his feet in no time, falling being a thing he's far too used to since the very first day he got his Quirk. Tenya aims another kick at Stain, and that, too, is deflected with the swing of a rough-edged blade, this time digging into his armor with a shrill cry. It'll leave a mark, definitely, but that doesn't matter because it hadn't exposed his actual leg at all. It wasn't severed, so he can still move, and if he can still *move*, then Tenya can—

"Idiot kid," Stain scoffs, making Tenya bristle. He kicks again, and is diverted *again*. A sword is aimed at his prone form, this time, the air whistling with the power in that one swing. "You're making me mad, but I'm a generous sort," the Hero Killer says like he's the judge and jury of life. "This is not a place for your kind. *Leave*. I won't say it twice."

Distantly, Tenya notices that someone else is here: a hero with a headband and a feather wedged in it. Their eyes look at him pleadingly, and—and why haven't they moved yet? This hero, they're being held against the wall by Stain, but wouldn't Tenya have heard a muffled shout, or seen them frantically trying to move away? Especially with that wound...

No, he's getting off-track. Though the hero's wound is serious, Tenya has to eliminate the threat first.

So he gets up, aims, *moves*—

—and is knocked down once more. Tenya's head rings as it bangs against the rough concrete floor, skin scraping painfully while he skids a little. When he forces himself up, the sword previously pointed just a foot away is now mere centimeters from his nose. Stain stands in front of him, eyes glinting dangerously.

"...You're here for vengeance, aren't you." Stain asks like it's a statement. "I am generous, yet not merciful—there are no exceptions to whom I target. Though I don't prefer it, I've killed children, too, and I..." He licks his lips with a tongue that makes Tenya want to writhe. "...do *not* ask twice."

In a roll that almost fails, Tenya avoids a sharp strike next to his head. When he pulls himself up, he can barely make out the blurred form of a jagged sword practically embedded in the ground. He barely has time to veer his head back when another blade attempts to cut across Tenya's face, stumbling to his feet with a twist and forcing space between them.

Tenya's jaw hurts from how hard he's gritting his teeth. "I am not a *child*," he seethes, spitting the last word out as if it could melt Stain into nothing. "I am the younger brother of the best older brother someone could ever have—someone *you* nearly *murdered*." Tenya feels the soft whirl of his legs as they heat up, its burn as smoldering as his glare when he meets Stain's eyes. "His body won't be the same; his *life* won't be the same, and I—"

"*Quiet*."

In a flash, Stain lunges forward and swings. Miraculously, Tenya dodges the brunt of it, feeling a spot along his cheek burn. Was there a cut there? He doesn't have time to recover, not when Stain grabs another of his swords and attempts to slice somewhere along his jaw, nor when he aims for Tenya's neck, his eyes, his ear, his arms, his—

There! Tenya aims a kick where he's seen a weak spot in Stain's endless flurry of blades, only for it to clang discordantly, a sword sawing through his leg's armor's layers, nearly grazing his skin. "Damn it!" Tenya curses quietly, foot already drawing back for balance, his eyes scouting for any opening, anything, something that he can use to kill this bastard.

When a blade dives for a slice across his forehead, Tenya, distracted by looking around, raises a hand to catch it, his legs nearly collapsing from how hard they twitch because he should've *kicked* that blade away why did he *catch* it?! He barely stifles a cry when it pierces through his gloved hands, metal digging into the flesh of his palm. Tenya's eyes dart around the blurry alley because he can't lose here, not now, please, *please* not now—

In a single second, Tenya locks eyes with the hero still bleeding out against the wall.

The hero does not move.

Gliding through Tenya's palm, Stain's blade comes out glistening with blood. Inexplicably, with the blade gone, the pain that'd burst on his hand flares tenfold, blood gushing out of the gash like a tsunami falling to the beat of his heart. Doubling over it, Tenya hisses, his other hand grasping his wrist. Oh God, oh *God*—

"Stop praying, kid," Stain scowls, taking advantage of Tenya's vulnerability and knocking him over. His spiked shoes push his chest down, and Tenya can't breathe. "You asked for this. There is no *God* saving you, let alone any corrupt *hero*." He pauses, as if contemplating something. "Younger brother, eh? Let's make you *twins*."

Tenya does cry out, this time, because his legs are slashed next. His Quirk's engines, he remembers belatedly, are embedded into his calves, enhancing the strength of them, and when Stain's swords can't pierce them for a moment, he rejoices. But then Tenya watches the Hero Killer raise his blades high, pointed down, and, and—and they're slammed down, *piercing* through Tenya's calves, making deep, gouging things that could've hit bone, and Stain does something that turns them into slashes across his legs and no, he won't think about it anymore, *can't* think about it (and won't be able to think at all if he's de—*no*.)

Though it takes him effort to force his eyes open from when he'd unknowingly closed them, Tenya manages to blearily see what makes that sudden awful, nauseating squelching sound, and whoever makes that terrifying scream: Stain, driving his sword into the other dying hero's wound further as if to emphasize his first point.

Rage whirls in his chest still, yet the pain makes him want to stand down, and so does the weight of oh *God*, instead of one person dying here, it might be *two*. This all ends up making him twitch on the ground, indecisive if he could push his Quirk to run, questioning if Stain would cut him down if he tried.

"How unheroic," Tenya hears Stain mutter, "going after what you want instead of saving others..." He silently screams when the Hero Killer plunges his sword somewhere in his thigh, rocking the blade back and forth in his flesh, and God, it hurts, it *hurts*, he's stuck here and it *hurts* and he's going to die and he's going to leave his brother alone and it hurts.

What can he do? What can he *do*? Tenya's helm is out-of-reach, so that makes an SOS impossible. If he screams, prone like this as he is now, would Stain rip his jaw off next? And his armor, it's nothing more than flimsy cardboard against Stain's blades. What else, *what else*—

The—the *vials*! The golden vials! Tommy wouldn't have given Tenya those if they were worthless, so if Tenya could just—

(Though his vision flickers, Tenya watches Stain lick one of his blades—)

—and then he cannot move.

Izuku watches Gran Torino slam the Nomu out of the train cart, frozen in place. When the passengers' screams at the train suddenly rocking from the break-out amplify, it's like something switches in his brain. Izuku can't hear anything but the screams as he leaps out of the train compartment, ignorant to anyone who tells him to stay put, Gran Torino's instructions becoming nothing more than a fuzzy memory. He charges ten percent into OFA and bolts across the train tracks, leaping up on headers and signs to get a higher view.

His breath hitches, steps faltering when he sees flames rising from afar. Izuku stumbles before tipping over, but even as his hand grabs a bar and swings himself back up, he can't help but keep his gaze locked onto the spreading smoke. Because it's—Izuku is still in Aldera High, walking towards—

"*Kacchan*," he whispers, voice broken, and that's all the incentive he needs to jump down to the ground of the city.

The people are in chaos. The screams Izuku heard from the train that still ring in his head mix in with the not-right ones of Nomus—Nomus, *plural*, a thought that makes his legs weak since one of them almost killed... killed All Might. Every black haired person he sees looks like their hair is as shaggy and long as Aizawa's, and he can't look at them if he doesn't want to see them bleeding from their heads.

Still, Izuku helps as much as he can. He dropkicks a Nomu into the ground to protect two girls like he's done for several others, ushering them away with a hand (and praying that they listen) as the Nomu skids, hard. It grabs at his legs, but Izuku slams his foot down on its neck, and it stops for just a moment. (He does not wince when its bones crack, shattering; he cannot hesitate in the face of death.) He doesn't have much time; Izuku has to figure out how to keep this going, how to keep this, this *amalgamation* down before it kills anyone, and—

"*Move away!*"

Izuku does without hesitation.

A wave of fire heads where Izuku once stood, and where the Nomu now screeches, burning alive. He covers his ears with a grimace, cringing away from its screams. It—it sounds like multiple people crying at once, as if they're all being torn apart, and... and Izuku can't look at it. He *can't*.

Looking over the fire, Izuku briefly locks eyes with Endeavor in the distance, his costume flaring wildly and stark against the darkness of the night. His blue eyes are as searing and dangerous as his flames, and Izuku barely recognizes the hesitant nod the hero gives him. But then, in seconds, he's gone, the number two hero having run off to save more people while the Nomu Izuku tackled still burns.

Before the scent of burning flesh becomes too much, Izuku turns away, too, going off on his own. He passes by buildings and people running, spotting other heroes in the chaos. They're not attacking, instead luring the Nomus to one area—maybe they plan for Endeavor to burn them all at once? Izuku hesitates, watching a few heroes push civilians away. When he uses OFA in large percents, his entire body thrums with its energy, hair-raising electricity crackling around him; perhaps, if he just channeled that throughout him but only used it to run, Izuku can—

"TENYA!"

Izuku's head whips over to an alley, shifting into a stance. He stands there, waiting, because this can't be a joke. If it is—

"*TENYA!*"

It's not. It's *not*, and Izuku's heart soars and sinks simultaneously. He doesn't hesitate to start running in, feet pounding on the ground. There's no time to be stealthy, not when that scream chills Izuku to his bones.

But then—

An explosion at his back nearly makes him cry out, his hidden scars flaring fiercely. Izuku stops his path and whirls around on instinct even as ash, wind, and smoke bombard his face, automatically looking for spiky blond hair. However, his eyes end up landing on a hero that lands right next to him on his back, scrapes littered across his form—their name has to do something with putty with how his arms are elongated, yet Izuku's hand clenches into a fist because now is *not the time to think about names!*

The creak of metal snaps him out of it. Another hero—Tauros, something easy to remember, based on Pokémon, *stop that*—tears a fire hydrant from its roots, spraying a fountain of water into the air. It bends, suddenly, and Izuku finds a third hero—Manual...? Yes, that's Iida's mentor!—twisting it to douse the flames the sudden explosion caused. Naturally, the direction of the water makes Izuku finally look up to see—

"Oh," he mutters, staring at the two Nomus bulldozing everything on the road they're on. "Oh no no no no no no—"

"Why did you run off *now*, Tenya...?!" Manual curses, and Izuku's heart sinks even further than he thought possible, because—because he—what can he do to help everyone? Who is the most important here? The people in the city, potentially dying to Nomus, or his friend that Izuku knows is in the alley just over there, his condition unknown?

Who does he *choose*? *How does he save everyone?*

"Get out of the way!" A hero with blond hair snaps, unintentional anger seeping into their tone. Izuku flinches, stepping back twice to see the back of a hero facing the Nomus. "We're holding him back here. Run like the others, follow the police evacuation instructions! We can handle this!"

Izuku feels a laugh bubbling in his chest. "We can handle this," they said. But all Izuku can think of is Aizawa's cracked head, of pouring ambrosia on his wounds, of All Might's wound bleeding with strain, of—this is all ridiculous. None of these heroes can compare to Aizawa nor All Might. None of them will make it out. Izuku is the only one with experience here, he's one of the few people who could defeat a Nomu, he *can* defeat Nomus with time, he—

"TENYA!" The scream loops in his head. "TENYA!"

("We can handle this!")

(Izuku has had little trust in most adults ever since he was four. Izuku's had less for heroes when—when All Might broke him and patched him up with tape.

But then, he remembers that heroes exist for a reason. They're supposed to be people that can be trusted. They're practically trained to handle most Quirks, especially those they're good against, and learn how to adapt and defeat others. They are strong for the people.

Every hero here can be pitted against one of a Nomu's Quirks. Tommy said Nedzu gave this place extra security of sorts, so if some heroes die, more can replace them, as practical as that thinking is.

Izuku... Izuku can go after Iida. It's fine.

[And, admittedly, Izuku can and will be very, very selfish for his friends.])

—surely, surely if Izuku just... just gives them the information they need, these heroes can handle the rest?

"Regeneration!" Izuku blurts out before he knows it, voice cracking when it tries to climb louder than all the chaos. Everything else spills out like a rush of water, his mind scrambling for more ideas or information to add. "The—The Nomu in U-USJ, I was there, it had regeneration, o-or healing! Enhanced strength! Physical *resistance*, not invincibility! It could regrow its limbs—probably its head, too! C-C—I don't know if it'll work, these Nomus are *definitely* different and the old Nomu was punched away, but if you try cauterizing the w-wounds before they can heal, the burnt skin will cover the—y-y-you *might* be able to get a sure-fire kill!"

The hero with blond hair alongside Tauros, Manual, and some others look at him with wide eyes. Then, Manual nods, picking up Izuku's words quickly. "Cauterize," he says after a heavy swallow, lifting a hand to a presumable radio over his ears. "You hear that, everyone?! Try to cauterize any wounds you make!" Manual's hand falls. "Okay. Okay, we can—Tauros, can you—?"

"On it! Thank you, boy!"

And they continue the foray, fighting for everyone's lives.

On the other hand, Izuku hesitates, looking at Manual. He—should Izuku tell him about—?

...No. Manual has to stay here to help others. (Izuku may trust these heroes here, but not with things like this.)

Izuku jerks his head away sharply, finally able to book it into the alley he heard Tenya's name in.

"I FUCKING *TOLD YOU!*" Tommy *screams*, pacing hurriedly across the fucking office Nedzu holds meetings or whatever in. Nedzu's called for an impromptu staff meeting that couldn't be ignored even though classes were over for the day and it's well into the night, but Tommy wouldn't have missed this shitshow even if it wasn't mandatory. "I KNEW IT, KNEW IT, *KNEW THAT THIS SHIT WOULD HAPPEN*, I SAID THAT HEROES *WEREN'T ENOUGH*, I FUCKING—"

"Tommy!" Aizawa snaps through gritted teeth, making the blond flinch violently. But with how he's staring at the news still playing on the TV, Tommy thinks that he's hiding the malice in his eyes, too. "Calm. *Down.*"

Tommy laughs, its pitches varying as his chest struggles to breathe. "Calm down? Calm *down?! There are fucking—*" He points at the TV screen, of which still displays a breaking news broadcast, showing smoke wafting from Hosu. Tommy's hand shakes as that same smoke seems to fill his senses until his voice comes out choked because of it all. "Aizawa, there are *NOMUS IN FUCKING HOSU*, and *IIDA AND IZUKU ARE IN HOSU*, and you expect *ME* to—?!"

"Yes," Nedzu cuts in, voice dangerously happy. He's drunk several cups of tea in the last few minutes, and with every minute that passes, the amount of refills he gets only goes higher. "Though we will touch upon how exactly Midoriya is there as well, thinking wildly like this will not do anyone good. Sit down."

Tommy starts pacing again, their words simply white noise. "The heroes there won't be enough! Ingenium, Iida's brother—he was attacked there by Stain, too, right? The whole fuckin' reason why Iida went there in the first place, that fucking wanker..." A muted explosion makes him flinch violently, nearly making him trip. "*Fuck*, these Nomus could allow Stain to kill more heroes, too! And during whatever the fuck this shit is, that won't—more people could—*Iida and Izuku could—!*"

The harsh clank of a teacup hitting a small plate jolts Tommy out of it. He turns, facing Nedzu again, who is giving him a less-passive-more-aggressive smile. "Tommy," the principal says. "If you aren't able to have a non-hysterical or panicked conversation over how U.A. should respond to this, nor able to handle any explosions broadcasted live no matter how reduced in sound, I request that you leave. Do so right now, or sit, calm yourself down before you give us another problem to deal with, and let everyone *talk*."

Tommy's chest still heaves erratically, and the world fuzzes around the corners, panic whirling in his mind. Every breath feels like its own bomb, really, and Tommy's entire being burns like crackling embers and spilt lava, but. But he's been through worse and still did so much more. Like *hell* is he gonna leave the safety of his class to all these fuckers who aren't Aizawa or Yamada, anyway.

So Tommy drops himself in his chair unceremoniously, barely flinching at the high whine it makes at his force, and twists his seat around so that he's not facing any of them nor the TV at one end of the room. His hand worms its way under his sleeve, picking at the bandages until his fingers can slip under. When his nail-bitten fingers push into the roughened skin of his scars, pushing and pushing until it threatens to break, it hurts enough for Tommy to ground himself.

For a long while, the only sound in the solemn, contemplative silence is Tommy's harsh breathing. His fingers push to a rhythm—one, two, three, four, hold; one, two, three, four, hold; one, two, three, four, hold...

"...I don't blame the listener for how he's acting," Yamada mumbles, sounding like he's running a hand through his hair that isn't in its signature gelled shape, but rather falling to his mid-back. "But—how do we act? Hosu is hours away, and if we go, by then..."

("—evacuation commenced just minutes ago," someone's saying on the TV, their voice nearly unheard over the revolving helicopter's blades. Their camera was locked onto the chaos last Tommy checked, the vibrant reds and oranges of fire piercing into the night. "There are mutated—creatures that are the cause of this. Heroes say they're called "Nomu," the same name given to one similar creature at U.A.'s trip to the Unforeseen Simulation Joint. As this pandemonium continues to go on, authorities are trying to—")

"Recovery Girl should be sent to that area anyway," Ectoplasm, Tommy thinks, suggests. He's learnt all of their names, but not remembered who was who yet. It's another thing that drags him away from how one of his students could be hurt and he should—be calming the fuck down. "She's one of the best healers Japan's had. Regardless of if Hosu's burned to the ground by the time the Nomus are handled, she has to be there to help the citizens." Then, like an afterthought, he adds, "Perhaps Thirteen, as well. Lots of rubble there, most likely. Cementoss, too?"

("—go, go, GO!" Wilbur shouts, those a part of L'Manburg heeding his orders without hesitation. A majority of them are citizens that were simply caught in the crossfire, interpreting his order as one to run. And these people scamper, desperately running over debris already splattered over the battle ground, fueled only by adrenaline and wild instinct.

But L'Manburg's army is ferocious as they charge into the battle, soldiers armored in part enchanted iron, part regular. Their swords cut through flesh like butter and cry against the Greater SMP's in shrill, ear-splitting tones like their own war cries. Bombs are thrown overhead, shaking the ground and blinding those near.

Tommy's somewhere among the L'Manburg army, blond hair covered by a helm so that he isn't targeted, and he's fighting against the tide, trying to make his way to—"Wilbur! Wil, I—")

Maijima's thick gloves rustle; he'd been in the support department before this, it seems. "All we can do is support right now," he states, "but we also have to prepare for the backlash after Hosu's settled. This is what, thrice Class 1-A's been in critical danger? Either villains are acting up, our security is dogshit, we're unlucky, or a mix of it all. But the public isn't going to accept any of those—they won't accept *anything*, really."

("—order that anyone in a ten to twenty mile radius of Hosu should prepare essentials and evacuate or get ready to do so at a moment's notice," the newscaster's saying. When Tommy helplessly takes the briefest look to the TV, the camera's shaking, honing in on a particular flying Nomu. Burns scattered all over its wings and their legs below their thighs cut off and cauterized, it screams, trying to fly higher futilely when a hand grabs it by its stump-legs and tugs it down.

He looks away, arm burning, because—)

"And it'd make sense if the school board finally let that class off longer now, right?" Snipe questions. His voice is more muffled compared to the others. "Or at least those near and in Hosu. They have to."

(Tommy's nearly swamped, but he makes it to the base of the hill, cursing all the way. His sword held loosely in his hands, Tommy flips it over to stab the blade into the dirt, hiking up the hill that his older brother stands on even when his injury screams agonizingly. He gasps desperately when he's near the top, an explosion [—that rings in time with the one on TV—] almost making him slip.

"Wilbur!" Tommy shouts again, gritting his teeth when the part-burn part-gash on his arm pulses. "*Wilbur!* Holy fucking shit, I-I just, my arm, it got—"

Wilbur shifts his cold gaze to Tommy, and for a moment, he freezes and thinks he might die. But then it softens into something more worried in an instant, and as he's picked up, Tommy knows he's safe.

[Safe. What a peculiar, fragile thing.])

"There'd be no reason they wouldn't." Aizawa says, his sleep-roughened voice a familiar thing. "Not with the trauma from the USJ and Sports Festival piling atop of my class. But Maijima's right; people will start questioning U.A.'s teaching methods, as well as how safe this school truly is. It won't be pretty."

"The trauma," Hound Dog mutters. "All the students here will be so scared..."

("Shit, Toms," Wilbur breathes, helping him to his feet. Tommy's entire vision spins. "That's so much fucking—*shit*, that—" His older brother turns his head, maybe, to look at something behind him. Tommy can't tell for sure, because all he can feel is the shift of Wilbur's head over his and his arm's screaming and it feels like pain's consuming half of him. "Niki! *Niki*, fucking *come over here!*"

As he's pulled into another's pastry-scented arms and helped into a medical tent, Tommy learns the difference between healing and regeneration. [Tommy thought he learnt what it means to be safe.])

Nedzu shifts back on his chair, maybe. "...I will deal with it," he decides, taking a long sip of tea from the sound of it. "U.A. has already taken more hits this year than in any of the decades it's been active. The USJ is, admittedly, something we could've prevented, had our security measures been better. The Sports Festival is mainly on Midnight, who will apologize to the public if she's not done so already."

(Someone turns the TV off. It's jarring, enough to where Tommy can feel how his breaths have slowed to a steady flow, albeit raw and vulnerable. When his fingers slip out of his sleeve, they're

stained red. He closes his eyes for a moment and imagines Niki still there, with her being the one with calloused, bloodstained hands, and he's—

[Safe?]

Tommy's stable.

...He's not choking on panic like a coward anymore, at least, because that fear is still there. But this time, it's morphing to a furious anger, one that Tommy knows he's felt only towards Dream, and for Tubbo when Techno—)

He wipes his fingers on his sleeve, hoping the bloody smudges aren't too obvious, and turns his chair back around. (Toshinori isn't here, Tommy notes. Either he's gone to Hosu to help, or he's on cool-down—the latter of which will be the death of hundreds.)

"But this... this is not caused by us," Nedzu continues. "This was caused solely by Stain, as well as whoever sent the Nomus—most likely the same people at the USJ—and Iida's internship merely coincided with this attack. They cannot blame this on us. But let's not focus on the future now, shall we?" The principal turns to Tommy, inclining his head slightly. "What do you think?"

Tommy sighs silently. Why the hell's *he* got the spotlight of this shit now? "I should go there with Recov if she's going," he says anyway. "Even if I can't help with healing, I can fuckin' help with repairs at least, in place of Cementoss. Plus, him and the rest of you fucks need to take care of people here when this shit impacts tomorrow; with Midnight down that's one less teacher, and I'm just an assistant. Might be able to bring some Nomu skin back or something for science-y shit." ...Even though the mere thought of touching something like a Nomu makes him nearly grimace. And, well, he can also check on Iida and Izuku there, too.

"What about Midoriya?" Aizawa asks, somehow sounding even more exhausted than he usually is. "Why is he in Hosu?"

"Because of GT." Tommy replies simply, leaning back. His fingers card through his hair once before he crosses his arms, fingers resting on his sleeves. "Gran Torino. Didn't tell me why, I think—just told me that he's on a fuckin' train going to Shinjuku. We were talking when all this shit started, too; Izuku's text suddenly had a fuckin', uh..." He frowns, taking his communicator out to show everyone despite his shaking hands.

21:38

<loveable cockroach> that's bloody brilliant of her! how'd she make all of the nano-machines in a fewwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww

<big man> A few what?

<big man> Izuku??? What the shit

<big man> This isnt funny, what the fuck

[MISSED CALL FROM: big man]

[MISSED CALL FROM: big man]

[MISSED CALL FROM—]

Coughing, Tommy lowers his communicator. He's not fucking embarrassed because Tommy Innit has nothing to be embarrassed of, but there's... maybe the slightest flush on his cheeks at how many times he called. (It's distracting, to focus on the sudden heat on his face than the terror those missed call transcripts bring back.) "Last time this shit happened, it was for the USJ," he says, pocketing the device, "so I just turned on the fuckin' news, and..." Vaguely, he gestures to the TV.

Hound Dog makes a sort of pained whine. Aizawa hits his forehead relatively lightly on the table, the form of his hands moving up his face hidden by his hair until the tips of his fingers poke through near the top. "Always that problem child," he mutters tiredly. "It's always him. *Why* him. Why this year. I'm going to retire early."

Nedzu claps his paws once, garnering everyone's attention again. "Okay!" He exclaims. "So here's what's going to happen. Tommy, you're going to go to Chiyo's home with the address I'll send you. She'll most likely be sleeping and be endlessly annoyed at you, but if you tell her what's going on, I'm sure she'll understand. You and her, along with whoever she may want to come with, will go—Cementoss, you will stay here.

"Then, you two will take the quickest trains and cars to Hosu, providing medical and architectural assistance to those there—mainly the former. You and Chiyo both will collect DNA samples of Nomus that will be sent back to U.A. by you both coming back when no longer needed, which will then be sent to laboratories for extensive research. Most likely, that will be in a few days time, as Iida and-or Midoriya may be injured due to the Nomu attacks.

"Meanwhile, the rest of us will stay here and handle backlash from the media, press, and public. Once again, this incident cannot be blamed solely on us, but rather these specific circumstances that clashed quite violently—be sure to push that constantly. Most likely, I'll be hiring engineers, information security analysts, possibly new heroes, and more to improve U.A.'s security. A new hero being welcomed here may never happen, mind, as we cannot risk telling just any hero about Toshinori's condition.

"Understand?" Nedzu concludes, taking a long sip of tea.

"Just fucking... go to Recov, go to Hosu, do med shit, do repairs, get DNA, come back," Tommy summarizes for himself. He takes his communicator out and types it all in a message to himself, hitting send and leaving the screen like that when he turns it off. "Okay, yeah, got that shit."

Cementoss sighs. "Though it does bother me that we're so helpless to this," he says, "I understand. All of us do." The rest of the teachers agree with silent nods or grunts of affirmation.

Nedzu smiles. "Well then!" He exclaims with disconcerting joy. "That will be all for tonight. Please get some rest."

"GET THE HELL OFF HIM!"

Izuku blasts forward with OFA before Stain can respond and clocks him in the face, feeling the satisfying crunch of fifteen percent of OFA breaking bones. He lands in front of Iida, turning his head to assess him, and—oh, oh no no no no no, Iida's *legs*, they're—he twists his head forwards again, managing to catch a hero (Native, he recognizes) leaning against the wall, a deep gash in his shoulder. Izuku wants to throw up. Izuku wants to throw up, because he looked at Iida's wounds and saw the slightest hint of bone, and he saw Native and Izuku thinks he can see the inside of his collarbone, and, and—

"Mi-Midoriya...?" Iida rasps out weakly, and Izuku feels a sledgehammer of relief hit him dead-on.

"Yeah," Izuku mumbles, just loud enough for the three of them to hear. He keeps his eyes on Stain, watching him rise slowly, a hand on his cheek that falls to the hilt of a blade. He doesn't even think that he's paying attention, so focused on keeping his breathing straight and his face blank. "Yeah. I'm—I'm here."

Izuku has no idea how long Iida nor Native have been there, bleeding out, but what he does know is this: five minutes. Izuku has, at best, five minutes before they die from blood loss.

Stain's eyes narrow at him, inexplicably. Izuku meets whatever challenge he wants with a scowl.

"Why," Iida asks. "Why are you—?"

"That doesn't matter right now, does it?" Izuku snaps back quickly. The air is filled with ozone, electricity crackling around him in waves. "People are dying outside of here, but I saw the news about Ingenium, and y-you were acting weird, and *I'm here to save you, you jerk.*" And then Izuku launches forward, channeling ten percent of OFA in his fist as he aims for Stain's face again.

A blade goes for his side when he's close. Izuku twists and redirects his fist instantly, slamming the side of it into the blade and hearing it shatter. The blast force attempts to bang him on the other side of the alley, but Izuku twists himself so that he lands on the wall with his feet, sliding down and pressing a palm to the ground. Behind him, the wall he landed on caves in violently, fragmenting into brick chunks, the small pipes running along it denting.

Izuku has just enough time to jump into the air when Stain lunges. He can hear the Hero Killer's blades scrape fiercely against bricks like they're set against a sharpening stone. Whirling around as he falls, Izuku lifts his leg and drives it across the air, twenty percent charged in the kick. The gale that it summons almost convinces Izuku that he put in more, though, especially when Stain's rammed into the dented wall seemingly painfully.

While Stain recovers, Izuku turns to Native.

"Run away!" Iida shouts, voice cracking. "This has nothing to do with you!"

Izuku resists the urge to kick a pebble at him. "It isn't Native's, either, and I wasn't supposed to meddle at the end of the Sports Festival, too, but we're *heroes in training*, Iida. Can you get up?" Izuku questions, still turned to the pro hero, "Or is it Stain's Qu-Quirk?"

"...Quirk," Native manages, breathing heavily. "Blood. He consumes it. Don't—know anyth'n' else."

("Cheating," Stain mutters.)

Damn it. Izuku did a little research on Stain after he'd learnt about Ingenium, and many have mused that Stain's Quirk caused some sort of paralysis. Guess they were right. He wouldn't have been able to carry them both anyway without being vulnerable to Stain to some degree, he thinks, grabbing his phone in his pocket.

"Okay," Izuku says, eyes snapping towards Stain, who seems to have finally recovered, throwing his broken blade away and replacing it with easy because of course he does. Izuku tries to remember his phone's UI—where the messages are, how to send his location to someone he knows... it's hard to navigate with just his thumb. "Damn it. Okay." When he hits send, it makes a little beep that has him

scrambling to cover it, so he ends up blurting out, "Just—keep breathing, stay alive, don't go unconscious. I'll get you both out of here... somehow."

"What a promise," Stain drawls with a wide smile, his blood-red eyes locked onto Izuku. (Is it bad that the only reason he flinches is because he sees Bakugo?) "But I have to finish what I started. One more step, little hero, and whoever's weaker will die."

There has to be a drawback to Stain's Quirk. It's not something that strains the Hero Killer at all, otherwise he'd have avoided paralyzing two people at once or killed less people in every area he's been in. Or maybe Stain's experienced enough to be able to handle it all without bringing himself down? So it's not something that hurts him in the long-run, either. One thing is clear, though: if he stalls long enough, it'll be revealed.

Izuku makes the first move again before Stain can. He gets into a stance that hides the way he snatches up some debris from the ground and blasts forward again, getting close before ducking under the Hero Killer's wide stance. As expected, a blade's already aimed at where he'll appear, but Izuku darts further out, praying to everything he wasn't cut at all. He turns, digging his shoes into the ground to stop moving, and throws the debris into the air.

A small knife connected to a cord whizzes towards him, aiming for his face, but Izuku powers twenty percent of OFA into his hand and lets it go, blasting the debris and the knife back towards the Hero Killer in time. Hopefully it got in his eyes or at least hindered his vision, because when Izuku springs into the air, the dust hiding him from Stain, he finds that he doesn't know what to do next.

So Izuku grits his teeth and throws his leg out, aiming to bash Stain into the ground.

His boot hits—*something*, thin and durable, definitely not a head. Blades, Izuku realizes; he's pushing down on blades because oh God, Stain's blocked his kick with his swords, that's not good, he has to get out, out, out. As Izuku lifts his other leg in order to try propelling himself off the metal, shifting his weight back, Stain drops one of his swords. It makes Izuku falter because he's pushing too much and leaning too far back and getting off-balance, and Izuku gets to see Stain's maniac grin as he grabs one of his legs and moves to, to *cut his costume no no NO*—

A volley of fire blasts through the alley, suddenly enhancing the smell of ozone. Stain lets go of Izuku, shoving him back in the process, and the latter tumbles back while rolling to his feet. "How disappointing," Stain scoffs while he looks towards the newcomer, his blades fortunately still clean. "*You all are getting in my way.*"

Izuku nearly cries when he sees Todoroki, in all of his flame-covered glory, standing at the entrance of the alley.

When Shoto sees the sudden message Midoriya sends him, a simple location with no context, he takes one look at Endeavor handling Nomus and doesn't hesitate to leave without a word.

That doesn't mean that he doesn't help out with capturing any Nomus he finds, however. As Shoto lets any pro hero he sees know about Izuku's location, he sends wave after wave of ice after a particularly strong Nomu that's pummeling a few heroes, enclosing its lower half in a tower of ice partially made by a hero controlling a fire hydrant's water. He makes a surge of fire run up the cold spike, a loud, fierce hiss erupting wherever the flames touch as the ice turns into water vapor. At least it hides the Nomu writhing in pain, Shoto thinks, giving the heroes he saved a quick nod before continuing down his way.

He ends up turning into an alley soon after, letting fire burst along his side when his nose picks up on the scent of ozone. Shoto follows it blindly, running faster and faster the stronger the scent gets until —

When Shoto sees the panic on Midoriya's face, he also doesn't hesitate to send a wave of fire directly to the Hero Killer.

After Stain lets go, Midoriya is at Shoto's side in a burst of power. "Todoroki...!" He grins, eyes glassy, and Shoto nods at him while assessing the situation, which... isn't good. Iida's wounds are bad, and the pool of blood under him's even worse; that's not mentioning the hero against the wall there, their breaths loud and laborious. They're both breathing, though, which is good.

"Once evacuation's over, heroes'll be here," Shoto says quickly and quietly, his skin prickling from the fire that burns along it. "Help those two. I'll stall. Info?"

"Blood-related Quirk," Midoriya relays just as swiftly. "Drawback u-unsure; amount of blood needed unknown." His eyes grow with panic, suddenly, and he crouches down to Iida. "Oh *hell*—f-f-five minutes! I-Iida, Tommy, the *vials*, where'd you put the—?!"

Shoto builds a wall of ice just in time for the Hero Killer to crash into it. He reinforces it once, then twice, lifting the unknown hero up and towards the entrance of the alley in the process. He can hear Iida just barely breathe, "Fah... fr'nt. P—ck't. Left. C'n't... see. Dih-dizzy."

As Midoriya carefully turns Iida over, who lets out a gut-wrenching cry, and starts rummaging, Shoto hears the sound of his ice shattering due to quick, precise slices. Eventually, the wall he's made shatters, exploding into clouds of not-quite snow and chunks of frost. But Shoto's prepared for that—he steps forward, a lane of ice spreading from the tip of his shoe, rising higher and higher to grasp Stain's leg in a vice-like grip.

The Hero Killer breaks it before it can even get close, but that leaves him vulnerable to the fire that weaves through the frost in a burst of steam, shooting towards him with accuracy. Shoto's eyes widen when Stain quickly reaches down, manages to stab one of the broken ice chunks from Shoto's ice-wall with his blade, and *uses that to shield himself*. It creates a thick, heavy fog, with the lingering fire on the ice shield being the only blip of light until it disappears with a hiss.

A sudden *snap!* from behind him makes Shoto turn around, forming a shield of ice behind and in front of himself when he's near-instantaneously faced with a gale of wind. It *roars* in his ears, already beginning to break the ice in front of him, yet slows exponentially as Shoto creates a bit of fire to give the ice in front of him some transparency. And through the cracked translucent slate is Midoriya, holding his finger with gritted teeth, streaks of energy still lingering on his seemingly broken finger.

"Gran Torino—limits," he says nonsensically in a strained wheeze. With the last of the draft dissipating, Shoto takes a brief glance to the side to find that there's ruptures running along the side of the alley, too. "Fog breaks in, in high winds. Iida's s-st-stable. *Focus*, Todoroki!"

Shoto does, just in time to hear the shred of ice against Stain's jagged blades behind him. He slides his foot back to reinforce the ice without looking, finally turning around with fire flaring on his side—only to violently lean back when a sword attempts to stab him from the side. No, wait—it doesn't stab him, but Shoto can recognize the sharp, thin prick on his scar, and the sudden wave of pain from that one cut is powerful enough to make Shoto's knees weak.

"*Fuck*," he grunts, slamming his foot down to build a dome of ice around him and everyone else behind him. Shoto focuses on reinforcing his ice, all the while shouting, "Midoriya! I got cut! This

shield won't last long, get Iida and the hero up, and—*ack—!*"

"T-To-Todoroki!" Midoriya yells, just as he can feel his body shut down. And with being unable to move, Shoto finds himself tensing his jaw constantly in an effort to not cry in pain, something he hasn't done since he was six. "I—Okay, Iida's healing, I-I just g—g-gave Native some healing su-supplies, I-I'll—can you use your Quirk? Hold up the sh-shield as long as you can, let me—"

Shoto feels himself being grabbed, swiftly yet gently being lowered to the floor. Midoriya's face hovers over him for a moment, worry written all over it as he moves in front of Shoto, Iida, and the hero—Native, supposedly. "I-Iida still can't m-m—move, Native can't, either, doesn't have to do with a-a—age, blood, blood, may-maybe contents of the—th-the blood...?"

"Why... didn't you leave..." Iida questions angrily from the side, just after Shoto's ice finally shatters and the air flares with ozone. His wounds are sealed, a pink mist wafting from where they were, but he still hasn't gotten up. Whatever Midoriya used can't cancel Quirks, it seems. "My brother... Stain nearly k-killed my brother... and I... I'll inherit Ingenium's name, so... so... why...?"

"Shut up," Shoto says when he shoves down a pained noise. Something breaks in the distance, crashing down; he feels the desperate urge to get up and see who got hit. "Ingenium wouldn't—*have* that face. That—anger."

Before Iida can say a thing, he adds, "And you've been—you're like. Like me. Angry. Desperate. *Lost*. Mid—" Shoto inhales sharply at a particular pulse of pain. He exhales shakily, his fingers twitching as he makes fire crawl up his arm. "Midoriya helped, you know. Let me... let go. Of pain. And—focus on other things. Made me get out of tunnel vision. If he wasn't—*hh*here, or if I didn't move on f—from my resentment, I'd be worse off."

When the flames reach the small cut, Shoto's thankful he's petrified right now with how he feels his face want to spasm, remnants of pain from long ago encompassing his scar. But all Shoto can do is grit his teeth and spit expletives and wait for the scar to cauterize. "My m—mother's forgiven me," he says. When the scent of burned flesh gets too overwhelming, Shoto stops his fire, releasing a relieved breath as he tries to fight tears. "And I've forgiven her. And earlier this year, I'd have gone to a—different agency. But she told me to move on. Not forgive. Move on. So I did. Endeavor is number two for a reason, and by—by pushing through my anger, I can learn from him."

"I think that's what you need," Shoto suggests. The left half of his face screams, but it's nothing he's not used to—chronic pain, and all. His fingers twitch. "To learn to move on, after this. Get up, train, live for things beyond bitter resentment. Stain has years of experience, and we're just heroes in training. Doesn't mean you should forgive Stain, or not go after him later, but. Have a clear head when you do, at least, and do this for everyone, not just your brother."

"You aren't answering my question," Iida states, breath hitching, something more sorrowful in his voice. "Why are you both... why can't you just *stop*...?"

Shoto smiles, though he doubts Iida can see it. "If you want us to stop, then *get up*. We're going to be heroes, Iida—our job will be to keep going no matter what."

And then Shoto forces himself up in one movement, flames lighting the alley anew.

edit mar. 5 5:50PM EST : thought tommy gave iida the apple form of ambrosia, not the vials.
fixed it now though so !!

LOOK i've been writing like in all the free-time i've had (yes i'm now shameless enough to write fanfic in school) BECAUSE THIS IS A TURNING POINT BAYBEYYYYYYYYY WE'RE HERE OH MY PRIME WE'RE HERE ?????????? WE GOT HERE. I THINK THIS IS HALF IDK AJGJKAGHAEHG,,,,,,,,,,,,,

STAIN ARC STAIN ARC STAIN ARC STAIN AR—

ok ok ok ok ok i'm. Calm. relatively so.

anyway !! i hope the fight scenes were good. sorry the dialogue's becoming so hard to read..... trynna add all the stutters and breath-hitches, yk? idk it makes it seem more realistic imo but yeah ajegjaejh,,,,,,,,,

i !! don't have much to say besides that i'm on a Roll rn and i think yall will get another chapter in the middle of the month, not at the end !!!!!!! wow! !!!!!!

ANYWAY, iiiiii hope you're comfy, well-fed, hydrated, and anything else that's good !! :DDD will see you sooner than usual :DDDDDD

survive.

Chapter Notes

WOooooooooooooo OKAYYYY TWO CHAPTERS DONE THIS MONTH ALREADY ???
WOW (who knows i might make a THIRD)

IM LIKE. JITTERING IN EXCITEMENT yall have NO IDEA
HHAAAAAAAAHSHSHSHAAAAA

if i keep going like this i might be able to finish this year but like. ehhhhhh this burst of motivation is like a one time thing abshshdwj,,,,,

i've also been editing chapters—mmmmmainly on here first. once i'm done on ao3 i'll prolly transfer it to wattpad. it'll take a while though; 'm on ch 7 and oh my god how do yall ??? read my shit ??????? its so, so bad ,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,

anyway yyyy! iiiii hope you're well-fed, comfy, hydrated, doing well, and everything else that's good !!! hpw you enjoy reading :DDD

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

How does one deal with any kind of grief? How does one move on?

This past week, these are questions Tenya can't find answers to. He isn't even sure if he could've answered it before this internship, before Tensei was... hospitalized. Maybe before then, he'd have said to not think about the problem. Maybe before then, he'd have said that so long as one has a good support system, they'd be alright. Maybe he'd say that if one were to stay strong, it'd be over eventually.

Now that he's experienced it, Tenya doesn't think it's possible anymore, to move on completely. He also doesn't think that grief will fade in its entirety. When Tensei recovers, or if Tensei—*dies*, both of these facts will linger like nasty, warped scars nestled in his heart, screaming until it stops beating.

So how *does* one deal with any kind of grief? How does one move on?

It all depends on the person, Tenya's realized. Bleeding out on the ground, breaths slowing, mind spinning, he thinks he's seen what his death is: a slow, drawn-out montage of memories. Happy ones, sad ones, angry ones, funny ones, embarrassing ones, all sorts of snippets from the past that make his entire being ache with longing and think about those two questions. Grief is like that, too, and so is "moving on," individualized things that take time to find, only showing in the lowest of lows.

So here is what Tenya thinks:

Tenya's grief is a storm—a tempest, or perhaps a hurricane. It starts in the calm waters of the sea and turns it all into whirlpools and charged water, before moving to the land and leaving uprooted earth in its wake, the wind screaming as it hurts everything it can erode away. Friendships, family, people... anything. And anyone around him who survives the wind will plunge into the oceans, sucked into this same dangerous grief, unable to get out and find help.

So unlike the past, Tenya won't run after and try to control it. He'll make everyone, including himself, wait it out. Tenya will find or build his own bunker, keeping in contact with others but not risking him or them getting caught up in the storm. He'll be alone, maybe, but he'll be safe from himself as the winds and the seas rage on.

His shelter will be made from and strengthened by the joy of everyone he'll save as a hero. (It'll start off as Tensei, laughing with him, an arm around Tenya's shoulders, saying "Well, if you admire me, Tenya, then I might be the best hero around!")

And when the storm fades and the waters become still once more, Tenya will come out of his bunker and move on.

"Moving on" will be rebuilding every structure his grief has destroyed. Whether it be the powerlines that connect Tenya back to the Internet and revive his cellular data for calls to the other broken homes and standing bunkers surrounding his, Tenya will mend it. Maybe he'll miss some spots, maybe he'll notice and leave them for another day. But regardless of its state, nothing he rebuilds will be the same as before.

So he'll upgrade those buildings, add basements and fortify walls and improve windows and doors. Tenya will get paint and he'll decorate them anew, turn them into something more beautiful than the last, and highlight all their new little flaws by letting time and life seal the cracks, plants pulling the buildings together with their roots. It'll be hard, strenuous work, something that makes his entire being hurt all the time. And when people come back, relieved that Tenya is safe, their smiles will brighten his world for many days to come.

Yes, grief will drill a hole in his chest and moving on will fill it with mud, but that doesn't mean that Tenya can't plant flowers in his heart and make it something newer.

(Tenya thinks he'll deal with his grief by saving others from theirs, and move on by seeing them smile in Tensei's place.

["People are dying outside of here, but I saw the news about Ingenium, and y-you were acting weird, and *I'm here to save you, you jerk.*"]

["If you want us to stop, then *get up*. We're going to be heroes, Iida—our job will be to keep going no matter what."]

And the first person he'll save from grief is himself.)

Tenya's hand thrums with strain when he drags his fingers into a fist, but managing to pound it against the ground seems to remove the rest of the Quirk-induced paralysis on it. His hand begins buzzing like he's pinched his nerves, that feeling travelling down his arm slowly. From there, it spreads to his torso and then to the rest of his body until Tenya's entire body shakes. Despite it, he lifts himself up, putting his full weight on his arm, and stands on shaking knees.

"Your right, Todoroki!" Midoriya shouts. The noise hurts Tenya's head. "Try to overwhelm him until I—*ah—!*" After the shrill cry of a blade being unsheathed, a loud thunk sounds right when Midoriya cuts himself off. Tenya grits his teeth, but keeps breathing.

The world shakes. Tenya stumbles on the first step he takes, boots covered in his blood, but he takes in a ragged, hard breath, charges his engines, looks up with blurry eyes, and—

"TODOROKI!"

Tenya started this fight just like this, and he'll turn it in their favor like this, too: with a swift kick aimed towards Stain, just as the Hero Killer's about to cut Todoroki in half.

The strike, perfectly aimed, breaks Stain's sword cleanly. He wastes no time in using that same momentum to twist around, slam-kick Stain to the side, grab Todoroki by the shoulder, and get some distance between them and Stain while the Hero Killer crashes into a wall. On the way, Tenya spots Midoriya against another wall, a hand on his stomach, the surface behind him fractured, and a small knife embedded next to him, dangerously close to his neck.

He can't return Midoriya's beaming, watery grin, so focused on Stain as he is, but Tenya settles with nodding for now.

"Bl-Blood type!" Midoriya exclaims. His breath hitches like he's holding back a cry of pain. "It—St-S-Stain's Quirk, the duration, Native's still not up, so, *blood type!* I'm O, so Todoroki—"

"I am, too," Todoroki affirms, giving Tenya a small smile. "You?"

"A." Tenya says, body leaning forward and prepared to move. His hand rests lightly where Stain once stabbed his thigh, now nothing more than a discolored patch of skin. "Native must be type B or AB. I-I'm sorry for everything, for what it's worth. You shouldn't be bleeding for me."

Stain spits a glob of blood out before Tenya's classmates can respond. "How annoying," he seethes as he gets up, "to act reformed to survive. Disgusting, unchanging, cancerous *vermin*..." He holds his shattered sword out, right at Tenya. "You won't change. When I get to you, you won't even be *recognizable*."

Earlier, Tenya would've probably charged at him for that. But now, he just smiles at Stain, a small, bitter thing. "Maybe I am a vermin," he concedes, "but all three of us are in-training. We've still got room to change."

Todoroki sends a surge of fire at Stain before the Hero Killer, who lunged at Tenya right when he finished his sentence, can get too close. It wouldn't have mattered anyway because Tenya's already moved away to help Midoriya up, looking away shamefully when, in order to down the rest of a vial of the golden healing liquid, Midoriya reveals a bleeding wound on the side of his stomach.^[1]

Midoriya sighs in relief as his injury stitches itself up, having been freed from Stain's Quirk as soon as Tenya came to help him. This time, when he smiles, Tenya returns it hesitantly. And then, in near sync, the two of them rush back to Todoroki's side, ready to fight.

"Something's changed about Stain," Midoriya mutters, Todoroki still holding Stain off. His eyes track Stain with pinpoint accuracy even through the ice and flames. "He's m-more—wild? He—up, Todoroki—his attacks, they're less coordinated, more unstable, like he isn't holding back anymore. I-I think he's serious now."

"Or flustered," Todoroki grunts out, creating a swirl of ice that wraps around the three of them and blocks a strike from Stain. "And that's all the better for us. Three against one—surely he'll tire faster, even with our inexperience. He'll get desperate, too—he'll get close at any cost, leaving him open." Todoroki exhales when Stain tries to get close again, his breath coming out as a thick mist while he throws more ice to the Hero Killer's way. "He's running out of time."

Tenya glances down at his legs, revving his Quirk up. Surprisingly, they activate, heat spewing from his exhaust pipes—perhaps more than usual, actually. Was it that healing liquid Midoriya gave him? (Tenya has a distant, crazed thought that maybe he should drink apple juice instead of orange juice.)

But that doesn't matter now, does it? He moves forward, watching, *waiting* for Stain to—

When several blades pierce through Todoroki's fire at random, Tenya doesn't hesitate to block them with his body. His side wails in pain at the three—no, four blades digging into it, a couple barely poking past his armor and into his skin, the other two deep in his flesh. He hisses sharply through his teeth and pushes through the pain, ripping out the knives that aren't in him too deep.

"Iida!" Midoriya calls out worriedly, hands hovering over him. Tenya brushes them away as he cranes his neck up, finding Stain perched on some pipes high above, waiting for Todoroki to stop using his fire.

"Stall," Tenya says. "We have to stall longer. At least until N-Native can leave and get help."

"We can't even run with him; Stain's too fast." Tenya isn't sure Todoroki meant it as a twisted joke—he's sure that wasn't a joke at all, really, but something in it has him laughing miserably. Maybe the running part.

All three of them, just beginning school at U.A., have to withstand someone who has years of experience killing full-fledged heroes. One of them—the only one with a Quirk related to running—got so consumed in rage he nearly *died* from it, and now none of them can get out of this in this instant. How funny.

Tenya knows better now, of course, but self-awareness doesn't stop self-depreciation. He hides from what must be Todoroki's sudden searching, possibly worried look, by yelling, "Keep the fire going!" He ducks his head, focusing on putting every ounce of power into his engines, feeling their own special heat emanating from them despite being so close to Todoroki's flames.

"Wh-What are you—?!" Tenya looks up again. When Midoriya does, too, realization gradually falls on his face. He lowers his voice. "W-Wait, if Stain's in the air he can't move as fast, right? And w-w-with how hasty he's become and with you as a target, Iida, you can lure him out, and I can—I can sneak from behind and, and we can overwhelm him and—!"

Tenya was thinking about something much more reckless, but he might as well go along with Midoriya, so he nods. Visibly, Midoriya swallows, looking back up before nodding. All at once, lightning crackles around him, energy racing across his costume and face, the air filled with ozone. "Okay. On my mark, Todoroki, you stop the f-fire. You move when Stain does, Iida, and I'll follow. Ready? Three, two, one—!"

Todoroki stops using his Quirk, the alley suddenly becoming a lot more dimmer. As predicted, Stain leaps down like a predator lunging for its prey. Tenya crouches down and rockets upwards with his Recipro: Extend, the wind blowing his hair back while his vision blurs even more. Next to him, just a foot behind, Midoriya leaps from wall to wall, climbing with him, higher and higher until—

For a moment, Stain locks eyes with Tenya, and then Izuku, eyes widening—

But even he can do nothing about Tenya's armor-strengthened calf ramming into his waist and Midoriya's Quirk-enhanced fist crashing into his jaw.

Izuku wanted to use only twenty percent since his finger still hurt from clearing the fog, but he must've used forty or so instead from the way Stain's bones crack and give easily under his fist. His arm pulses, border-lining pain, but that doesn't stop Izuku from keeping his eyes open, locked on the Hero Killer, who—who can still move, *who can still move*, enough to where he slashes as Iida's hair, no no no no *no*—

"TODOROKI!" He screams as the three of them start falling, watching Iida manage to land another Quirk-boosted kick to Stain's gut. "NOW!"

"I KNOW!" Todoroki shouts back, already making rushes of flames clamber up the walls to them. It's not fast enough, Izuku knows it isn't, so he grits his teeth, twists mid-air, and assists in striking Stain again with his foot. He tries to aim for the kidney; anything that hits the kidney can cause someone to pass out, Izuku thinks.

His kick ends up pushing Stain away from Iida, and Izuku only realizes that Stain's frothing blood from his mouth because Todoroki's fire burns it away with a hiss. Just as he's about to tell Todoroki to stop, he does, with Stain's face only having a few large yet minor burns on it. It gives him a confusing, odd sense of relief and accomplishment as the three of them get closer to the ground, Izuku and Iida being caught by the smooth planes of Todoroki's ice while the Hero Killer tumbles on the ground. (They end up slipping and landing nastily anyway, but that's not the point.)

"Stand up!" Todoroki demands. "He's still..."

Izuku bites back a curse, hearing the sound of rising ice. "Even after all of that...?"

But when he manages to lift his head up, the Hero Killer, laying on a small cliff of ice, face shadowed by his scarves and long, dark hair... looks *dead*.

The three of them stare at him for what feels like hours.

They're all breathing. Izuku's hand hurts, his legs are beginning to hurt, and Iida might've been grazed while in the air. Todoroki's the only one relatively unharmed despite how the burn on his face looks worse. But—but they're all breathing, *and the Hero Killer looks dead*.

Izuku feels an incredulous smile creeping on his face, tears welling in his eyes. "Did—I-I... I think we *killed* the *Hero Killer*. I—I think I *broke his face in*. Oh my God..."

When Todoroki looks at him, his face is impassive, but there's a bit of hysterical mirth in his eyes, too. "I burned his face."

"And I—I think I *paralyzed him like he did my brother*," Iida says, something that sounds like desperation but probably isn't in his tone. He looks at his legs, haunted. "Did—are we going to jail...?"

"Personally?" A voice—Native—calls out. Izuku jumps, him and Iida whirling to the side and towards the wide-eyed hero, who's currently and finally able to get up to his, albeit wobbly, feet. Todoroki doesn't turn, but a jolt of ice jumps from the ground in Native's direction. "I... I think you all deserve the highest awards U.A. can offer."

Izuku swallows. "Todoroki, you should probably restrain St-Stain anyway," he suggests, making his way to Native. Iida's looked away, already moving towards his discarded glasses and helmet. "A-Are you—Native, are you alright?"

Native smiles, a tired, exhausted thing. "I—"

The crack of ice makes Izuku twist around, eyes locked in wide horror as—oh God—as Stain gets back up, broken blades in hand, and Izuku's already charging OFA in his legs, aiming to knock Todoroki out of the way because Izuku told Todoroki to restrain Stain which is why Todoroki lowered the Hero Killer down but now there's a cut on his hand and a small blade in the ground and Stain's too close and there's ice along Todoroki's arm and fire growing on the floor but it's all in slow motion and it'll be too late—

—but then *SomeTHThING hHaPPEns*.

Todoroki's hand stutters. Stain's tongue, right at Todoroki's palm, hesitates. Something... something happens between that, something Izuku can't explain, something... something like a glitch that twists the entire world for just a moment, but it—it causes Todoroki's ice and fire to, to switch places. *Fire* now climbs along his hand, *ice* seeping across the floor, and Todoroki's hand... *twitches*, or something, grasping Stain's tongue tightly, fire probably over a thousand Celsius gathering in his palm, orange and vibrant, and—

—and Todoroki—

burns

Stain's

tongue

off.

Time slows to a halt.

The sizzling sounds like it lasts forever. Izuku can see half of Todoroki's face from here: his gray eye wide in horror, hand still bleeding, fire flaring from his skin, Stain's tongue in his hand. The flames, orange and vibrant, run over his knuckles, through the crevasses of his fingers, and concentrate at his palm. There's blood dripping from Todoroki's palm; Izuku isn't sure who's bleeding anymore.

Izuku doesn't know if Stain's trying to pull away, or if he's so exhausted that he can't. That, that primal noise of *agony* he makes, though, will ring in Izuku's head for hours.

This scene will be in his head for weeks.

And then, slowly, suddenly, time resumes.

Todoroki lets go, turning his Quirk off in an instant, but it's too late. Part of Stain's tongue is, is—it's blackened, *charred*, a hand-shaped band of burnt flesh around its bumpy, long form, starkly thinner and weaker than the rest of the tongue. Stain doesn't even back off or pull his tongue back in; it's like he dies then and there, body slumping against Todoroki's. (There's a belated, sharp inhale; it might've been Native, it might've been Todoroki, it could've been all of them.) If anything, that makes Todoroki look more terrified, looking at his hand and the Hero Killer on him in horror.

It worsens when the burned part of Stain's tongue severs itself. It worsens when Izuku hears the still-flesh-like tip of the Hero Killer's tongue fall to the ground with a wet sound.

Izuku still wants to throw up, but he doesn't. He swallows his bile down instead, taking shaky yet determined and hurried steps towards his friend. When he's close enough to Todoroki, who hasn't moved, Izuku gently takes Stain off of him and sets the Hero Killer on the ground far, far away. From

the sound of it, Iida's approaching Todoroki, too, yet with more hesitance like he's getting close to a fragile balance that might blow up if the wind brushes it the wrong way.

"I—" Todoroki exhales shakily. When Izuku turns around, his expression is so hauntingly familiar Izuku can remember how it felt. He has to look away. "I didn't do that. I *didn't* do that. I didn't *mean* to do that. I—I was only going to use *ice*. I was going to *freeze him in place*. I was... I... was..."

"I know you weren't," Izuku says, pushing all the confidence he can into his voice. When Todoroki looks down at his hand, ashes and blood mixed together, Izuku shoves down his fear, grabs Todoroki by the shoulders (slowly), and demands, "Look at me." When he does, Izuku continues, forcing himself to stare into Todoroki's horror-filled eyes. "I saw the ice. It—it just... switched places all of a sudden. You can't do that in an i-instant, or else I'd have been defeated a lot faster in the Sports Festival."

Iida, with glasses back on his face, nods and moves to Izuku's side. "...Though brief, I did see the ice, too," he affirms. Todoroki relaxes just the slightest, yet he looks back down to his hand. As if able to tell that they won't be getting farther in terms of comfort, Iida asks, "Did... did either of you see what happened between that moment? Something shuddered before Stain's tongue... *you know*, and I, I didn't get a clear view of—"

"Strings," Todoroki answers, voice quieter than usual. "There were... *strings* on my ice, and... and they—*tugged*, I think, and... and then the switch happened."

Strings. Izuku has a list of heroes and villains in his head with string-related Quirks, from Black Widow who's part spider, to Pinocchio the Puppeteer, to Silk: the Weaving Hero, but none of them are in Hosu right now, as far as he knows. And why would any of them try to interfere in a fight like this? Villains have nothing to gain from Stain since he was—is—was dead-set on his morals, and Stain despised heroes.

"I think I saw those, uh... *strings*, too," Native says, coming to them with the feather from his headband in his hands and heavy footsteps. Said footsteps are why his voice doesn't make the three of them flinch. "They... looked more like ropes? To me? Either way, they were really, *really* thin; the only reason I saw them was because of my Quirk." He holds up the feather with a sheepish smile, the slight curve that it gives to his eyes seems to highlight how red they are. "Gave myself some eagle eyesight for a bit by accident; it fell off and into my hands during your fight."

Todoroki relaxes more. With the smoothness of someone who's done it for years, he wipes the terror off his face, resetting it back to a blank expression. Of course that's easy for him, because Izuku knows Todoroki hadn't lied to him during the Sports Festival, and it—hurts his heart, that Todoroki can (had to, has to, will still) hide his pain like that. "It's not my fault."

"It isn't. Just some... unknown source. When I looked up, the strings looked like they literally came from the sky, so."

Todoroki nods, most of the tension seeping out of his shoulders while he finally lowers his hand. "It's not my fault," he repeats. He hesitates before covering his palm in ice, waiting, and then melting the ice, washing off the ash and blood. Already, the cut on his palm has stopped bleeding, but Todoroki covers it with ice anyway. "...We should still restrain Stain."

At the reminder that they just defeated the Hero Killer, Iida's gaze turns a little lost and dazed. "Yes," he agrees slowly, staring at the man that paralyzed his brother. They all are. "Yes, let's... do that."

The Hero Killer is down at their feet, possibly dead by their hand, but Izuku's never felt this far from accomplished.

The people part for him like the Red Sea as Enji barrels through the streets, head inclined towards the air. His eyes dart around, watching for fires he didn't cause, and when he sees one, he charges towards it.

So far there's been two Nomus, one that the esteemed elder and he had killed, and the one that the kid with green hair dragged through the ground. Enji would've gotten to this place faster, but because of the chaos, small-time villains have decided in their supposedly *multi-celled brains* that it was the perfect time to cause more havoc.

(Not to mention whatever... *snapped*, and caused some buildings to collapse. Though Enji has always aspired to take the spot of number one hero, All Might's assistance would be plenty of help this time.)

Enji's there just in time to crash a flame-covered fist into a Nomu's face before it kills a blonde hero. He ignores her stammered thanks to glance around briefly; good, none of the other heroes are in his way. That means he can end this quickly—a good thing, because death has to be better than living for these things.

He doesn't waste time like the efficient number two hero he is. Wrapping his hands around its neck, Enji squeezes, watching its burn-covered face open its jaw and scream as it's engulfed in blue flames, incinerating its head almost immediately. Enji lets go and backs off, sending a wave of blue fire where its heart should be for good measure.

"What do you know about the Nomus," Enji barks out, gaze snapping towards a hero with a bleeding arm. They straighten, pinned under his expectant stare like a butterfly.

"Regeneration, healing, super strength—and physical resistance," they list off, breathing heavily. They grab their arm, wincing. "A kid—green hair, freckles—they said that's what the Nomu have. Could vary on the Nomu, though, but he was in the USJ—I know he was, I saw him on—"

"Enough," Enji cuts off. "Help the citizens and the evacuation, and extinguish all fires. I'll search the area and handle any other Nomus that come my way." He's most likely the only one capable of doing so regardless of what the others' Quirks are.

"I—yes, sir," the same hero says. Suddenly, they raise a hand to their earpiece. "...Ekou Street, District Four..." They mumble. "What's going on there?"

If they continue speaking, Enji can't hear. He's already left, scaling up the walls of buildings, and when he hears a pained, inhumane screech somewhere above, his head whips towards the sound, finding a Nomu with no legs *far* in the distance. And then, in a flash of red-hot flames, Enji's run off again, his tunnel vision honing in on the Nomu.

Chiyo turns her phone off with a frown, snatching it from Tommy's hands. "If you keep watching that," she starts, voice betraying her worry, "you're going to lose it."

And she's fucking right, Tommy is literally going to go *fucking* crazy if he keeps watching it. But he, *he has* to know what happens next, Tommy *has* to know if he'll see a single glimpse of any of his students as pixels on the screen, he has to see if they'll be show on hospital stretchers and covered by

blankets like the cameras focus on sometimes—he has to know what happens next. (Tommy has to know if he's failed.)

But when he looks up, the world is too—*much*, too *dark*, something that makes him recoil slightly in the seat of Chiyo's car. It's like so late at night it's near morning, yeah, so he should be used to this shit, but Tommy's been staring at the news broadcast for, what? Half an hour, ever since he found Chiyo and managed to convince her to let him see the news? Or just an hour?

"Just an hour," Chiyo affirms, eyes back on the road since the traffic light above turned green. In his sleep-deprived mind, Tommy realizes that he's mumbled a little, as well as that Chiyo probably needs some sort of tool or some shit to push the pedals of this car down since she's so short, and that thought is incredibly hilarious to imagine so he snorts. Chiyo's hand tightens, and Tommy knows that he's said that thought aloud as well, and that if Chiyo had her cane, Tommy would probably be knocked out until they get to the trains.

"How th' fuck are you *this* wide awake?" Tommy soon grumbles. He is too, for half of the week usually, but that's because of *nightmares*, not on whatever Hatsume-created concoction Chiyo's on.

"You don't know how being a nurse or doctor full-time works, do you, dearie."

Ah. So Tommy doesn't *really* want to know.

In a very subtle fashion, he says, as if he doesn't know already, "So where are we going again?"

"To the train station," Chiyo replies. When the car turns, Tommy finds himself smushing his face against the window closest to his side, watching the world pass. "Fortunately, I used to work in Hosu. There's a hospital there I trust, and if I'm asking for people, they'll certainly provide. We're also almost there."

Tommy checks his inventory, quadruple-checking some shit. Chiyo gave him several medkits, bandages, and more medical shit to add to the stuff he packed on his own. He still has ambrosia, and the containers specifically for when they collect Nomu DNA remain isolated from everything else.

Tommy closes it, looking up at the roads again, running a hand through his hair and biting his fingernails. His hand itches to get Chiyo's phone in his grasp again.

Yeah. They haven't even hit the halfway mark of this shitty trip, and Tommy is going to go fucking bonkers at this rate.

Shoto feels like the world's too calm, after what he didn't mean to do.

They're cleaning up the alley, Hero Killer still... passed out, and Shoto feels the calmest he's ever been, really. It was far too easy to take what he did to Stain, put it in a box, and set it away in his mind. But Shoto's sure that if he ever focuses on it, he'll only regress, back into some sort of mindset that his fire's bad. Midoriya nearly broke his entire being to reverse that, and going back is disrespectful to that.

That doesn't mean he'll not think about it; of course not. It just, Shoto's going to look at it as if he's an inspector of sorts, given the case and told to record everything he finds. (But here, right now, he's so detached from everything that it scares him.)

"...The tongue," Midoriya says, breaking the period of silence where no one did anything but clean up and restrain Stain. Instead of bringing all the attention to him, Shoto feels Iida and Native's stares on himself. "Wh—How are we... going to... ex-explain that? Forensics and investigators won't miss it, Todoroki's the—the only one here who has fire, a-and..."

Shoto stares at the piece of flesh that none of them have touched. It looks near alien, with its irregular form and burnt end. "Can I say that I did so in self-defense?" He asks, still staring.

"Most likely." Native replies. He shifts, foot sliding towards Stain, before he decides something in his mind and officially moves towards the Hero Killer. "Studied law a little, when I was younger. Article 36, was it?" He questions nearly to himself, setting a hand on Stain's neck. "*An act unavoidably performed to protect the rights of oneself or any other person against imminent and unlawful infringement is not punishable.*" ^[2] This is the Hero Killer; surely he'd have killed the three of you if you ran instead. Hell, Tenya was nearly dead. This *has* to count.

"...oh," Native breathes quietly, fingers pushing a little more into Stain's neck. "He's alive, but just barely." Shoto looks away when Native opens the Hero Killer's mouth. "Tongue's pretty charred; if a healer with some kind of mending Quirk gets here, I don't think we can reattach his tongue without cutting more off. Even then I doubt it'd work the same."

He's alive. Shoto can hear Iida and Midoriya's sighs of relief, nearly shadowing his own.

"That's—that's good!" Midoriya exclaims happily. "That's really, *really* good. B-But, ah..." He glances at the entrance of the alley nervously, and then back to the Hero Killer, smile fading. "We should stay here, right? Or at least, just, you know, take all of his weapons out. Stain's still st—uh, *strong* enough to, uh, fend three people off, even if we *are* students. We might've just, uh... just disabled his Quirk, a-and I—I'm... he's not dead, but his body, it was hit with both my Quirk and Iida's, so I... I don't think it's safe, to move him?"

Yes, the discoloration on Stain's skin is growing quite prominent now. Shoto can see the clear form of a fist on his cheek, along with harsh bruising appearing on his arms. Shoto's already burned Stain's tongue off (the casualness of it all still bothers him, but not as much as it should), so affecting these other wounds in any way will only bring the Hero Killer closer to death.

The irony.

Shoto swallows. "...Should I," he begins, hesitant and slow. "Should I use my ice to reduce any swelling, or...?" Or are the strings going to change it again.

Native worries his lip under his teeth. "No," he says eventually. "I don't think it's safe. If you think you need to, however, try your Quirk out somewhere else first."

Oddly enough, Shoto was hoping slightly that Native would say that. With a nod, Shoto opens his mouth to speak again—

"What are you doing here, kid?!"

Whipping towards the entrance of the alleyway, Shoto can see Midoriya and Iida already charging up their Quirks from where they stand farther ahead. Shoto himself can feel a shock of ice roaming across the ground already, that sparking feeling before he uses his flames simmering under his skin. But then Native, who's tensed with the rest of them, gasps and relaxes, and Midoriya's skin dims in an instant, and Shoto... *thinks* it's safe? Native and Midoriya certainly think so.

"Gran Torino!" Midoriya beams, stepping towards him, but—

In an instant, Shoto's made a large ice wall behind them all when Gran Torino kicks Midoriya's face dead-on. But the kick has less strength and speed than expected, or maybe Midoriya's so used to them that he's become resistant, because it doesn't blast him back or anything. It's more like the strength of a shove to a shoulder—Shoto thinks. He's only seen it between strangers who are friends, and it seems relatively harmless when they laugh together.

Flipping over, Gran Torino lands on the ground silently, Midoriya rubbing his face lightly. "I told you to stay on the train! You are my *intern*—do you *know* how much chaos the city's going through right now, boy? You're inexperienced, I say! You're not supposed to be handling anything!"

Intern, huh? Shoto melts the ice wall, noticing Iida's legs powering down as Midoriya says, "I—I know that!"

"Clearly you don't, if you're here!"

"W-W-Well, I, I just—okay, just because I know that doesn't mean I'll *listen*—a-and why are *you* here, anyway?"

"Why am *I* here?" Gran Torino sets his hands on his hips. "I was told by other heroes to come here. Most of them can't right now, because the city is in *chaos* and *you should've stayed on the bullet train* —"

"But—!"

"—but I'm the fastest out of all of them, so I volunteered to go while the rest handled Hosu." Gran Torino looks behind Midoriya (probably. Shoto can't tell behind his mask), spotting Native, Iida, and himself. "Were these three dragged here before me?"

"N-N—No, not exactly. They were, uh—okay, so, um, I was in the Hosu chaos for a, a while, and—" Midoriya huffs, crossing his legs and sitting down in the alley. Absentmindedly, he rubs his leg. "Okay. First thing's first, I'm s-sorry for running off. It was i-irresponsible of me, and I should've listened to you."

"Damn straight!" Gran Torino grumbles.

"Second—i-it's a really long story, but, um. Basically—" Midoriya gestures towards the restrained Hero Killer back in the alley with pizzazz hands, and Shoto imagines that there's a sheepish, lopsided smile on his face. "—we took down Stain!"

Gran Torino stares, finally noticing the figure shadowed by lingering ice (that Shoto soon melts) and the tall buildings bordering the alley. "*What?*"

It's all the context he gets, because more footsteps come running at them. Gran Torino looks back swiftly, but he doesn't move to attack, so Shoto doesn't, either. A bunch of heroes appear soon after, covered in grime and scrapes on their bodies. Finally, people start calling the police after they, too, notice the Hero Killer half-tucked in the alleyway, and Shoto feels awkward as he steps out the alley and is bombarded with attention.

"Your scar, is it okay?" One hero asks, another popping in with another question, and Shoto has to say that yes, he's cauterized it, no, the entirety of it wasn't redone today, yes, he only sealed a minor cut

because Stain could've paralyzed him with a drop of blood, no, Shoto isn't injured anywhere else, and he's also not lying, yes, his temperature's fine, he used both fire and ice to regulate it during the fight, and no, once again, he's not suffering from any drawbacks, please go attend to Iida, he has much worse wounds than Shoto—okay, thanks for the protein bar and juice box, he doesn't need those but it's very appreciated, *please go help Iida*.

They're basically nurses and doctors, at this point.

Even if these heroes truly were experienced healers, that doesn't stop Iida from pushing past them, approaching Midoriya and Shoto again. "...I'm still sorry," he says, bowing. In the light of the street lamps and night sky, Shoto can see the gashes in his costume, revealing slightly discolored skin. "You both were injured because of *and* for me. I... I don't know how to make it up to you both." Iida's voice gets a little wobbly, and oh, Shoto doesn't know how to handle tears.

So, quick as Iida's Quirk, Shoto cuts in. "Repay us by pulling yourself together and getting checked by the ambulance when it comes," he orders, watching Iida suddenly look up with wet eyes.

Shoto pauses, glancing at the protein bar and juice box in his hands. He ate a little of the bar, but if he snaps the bitten quarter off, it should be fine, right? And the juice box—it's orange juice, and Shoto thinks he saw Iida drink a bottle of it, once, so...

He breaks the bitten part of the protein bar off, popping the rest in his mouth. It's quite good. He then cuts the remaining bar in ragged halves, handing one to Midoriya and the other to Iida. The latter, however, gets the orange juice as well, and when he doesn't grab it immediately, Shoto presses the food into his hands until Iida does.

"T-Todoroki's right," Midoriya pipes in, eating his bit little by little. "But I also think it's worth it if... if everyone can see that you've, you know, grown. And I—I'm also sorry, because I knew something was wrong, but I d-didn't push hard enough, and—"

"—I wouldn't have let you in anyway," Iida interrupts, voice choked even more, somehow. Shoto feels his face fall into something blank. Did—did he cause that? The food and drink was supposed to help, not make Iida cry *more*. "I-I just..." He laughs wetly. "Sorry."

"You're fine," Shoto reassures, but then when that's all he says, Midoriya smiles out of nowhere, and he's probably supposed to say more, so he adds, awkwardly, "It's over now, isn't it?"

"Yes," Iida says, wiping his eyes. "Yes, it is."

And then—

—*a scream.*

The first thing Izuku thinks as he whirls around to the noise only to be snatched up is, God, not when things were just calming down.

Because they were! It all was! But now Izuku's being—is he being held by his hoodie? He can feel clawed hands piercing his hood, the faintest graze of, of a mask or something against his hair, and, and oh. He's being carried by a Nomu.

Izuku starts writhing immediately. He tries to swing back and forth, because if he gets enough propulsion he can maybe back-kick this thing in the gut. But he's too short, and God, he should've put

spikes on the back of his shoes or something. Too late now, because he's rising higher over the ground and the farther he gets the more Izuku's taken back to his middle school days and that feeling of numbness creeps in, so Izuku slips a baton from his sleeve and tries to stab the Nomu in the eye because he's close enough *and he needs to get down*—

Izuku's falling to the ground before he knows it, a cry of pain clawing out of the Nomu's throat, and— and someone's hands have grabbed his hood and stabbed the Nomu in the brain oh God, and Izuku's face scrapes painfully against the ground, but it's nothing compared to the sudden fear he feels when he's able to open his eyes and see Stain, throwing up blood with a foot on the Nomu's winged back. There's a knife embedded in its back, Izuku realizes, right where its wings meet and where Stain's foot is.

Stain cuts its thrashing wings off and stabs its thigh in swift movements, like he doesn't have broken bones everywhere. (Belatedly, Izuku notices that it has no legs, but charred stumps.) He breathes raggedly, head down, but Izuku can see his face as clear as day. Those red eyes paralyze him in place, especially as they slide down to his staff.

"Dusk..." He exhales with a maniac grin, saliva spilling from his mouth, and Izuku's eyes widen. What does Tommy have to do with— "All Might... *they* are the only true heroes." Stain bends back, head upside-down towards the crowd behind them, sword directed towards them. "And you all... deserve to be *purged*."

With blood foaming from his mouth, Stain bends forward and hurls, spine cracking painfully. His knees buckle in, and then he—*collapses*.

His chest isn't moving.

Stain is *dead*.

Chapter End Notes

1. accidentally used the apple form of ambrosia last chap; iida was given the vial form. uhhh if in this chap or the last i make that mistake again please lmk !!!!!!![\[return to text\]](#)

2. [japan's laws](#); got this off quora ajwfhagh[\[return to text\]](#)

===

III.

i Illusion.

Quackity visits, every day week month year time. he is glinting netherite and diamond, dripping crimsGOLD.

Alone. *trapped*.

Dream is reaching through wxistence and clawing to another and breathing in air that fills his lungs and sunlight that can scorch him and grass below his feet and a broken life that is his anchor to his goal. he runs red yet his hands will grasp what gods cant

it's dream's execution, Isn't it?

no, no quAckity is far more merciless than that. of course he is

Dream would not want any less.

After all, he's been molded by drEam's hand, too

shears. knives. healing only to undo

Apotheopolis.

Ha. Ha. *Ha*. How resourceful of Quackity. To use one of Dreams tricks for himself. *to carve a god into man*

Dream stains the walls s g

g ll d

ggo ld

re d?

fingertips drip paint on the ground; tick. tock. tick. Tock.

Even now, suffering is a work of masterful art

bloodichor-stained obsidian flashes to wood. He skims the surface with his finger, traces the lines in the infested planks.

warping squares

Reality stretched in

wa

ys it shouldn't.

Black. Cold. purple age lines. Gleam of glowstone, shining bloody gold

Hallucinating. He's hallucinating.

He's—alone.

Dream shatters the glo wstone

and laughs. knuckles bleeding disgusting mixed ichor

Skin ripped to shreds with shards embedded

How wretched. How utterly despicable, the way these roles have turned.

transcendence of the macrocosm.

Living between the layers.

this has always been his game

dread.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Nothing is going right. Nothing is going *right*, and it's the worst thing Tomura's felt in ages.

The Nomu were killed too quickly, for all that Sensei said about how they were like the one that All Might fought. Maybe he shouldn't have placed them in such a populated area, especially with the Hero Killer around. Security would've been on high alert already with just that man in the area; fuck, Stain was a God damn *calling card*, and it's alerted all the damn Palace guards.

Tomura scratches his neck, careful to not jostle Father too much. Sensei will be so disappointed, not only in how long this chaos has lasted—a measly two or three hours—but in how *weak* the Nomus are, how Stain's weak enough to die, and how *stupid* this all was. The Doctor'll have to step up his damn game.

"Master Shigaraki," Kurogiri calls. Tomura glares at him with a kill that'd make most wither up and die.

"*What*," he spits, fingers still digging into his neck.

Kurogiri is unperturbed, as per usual. "Not all of this was for naught," he says, as if that fucking helps. "With this, not only have we instilled fear into the people—as we have now proven that we can create more Nomus—but we have also gathered valuable research for better, stronger Nomus, as well as where and when to attack."

Tomura's fingers halt for a moment as he contemplates. ...Yes, that could be fine, he decides. "Like a boss fight you've repeated," he mutters, staring into the vague, toxic-yellow forms of Kurogiri's eyes. Tomura looks away, back to the city, watching the amount of rising smoke diminish bit by bit. "We can improve, but they can't. They have a set pattern, but we have all the cards—we are unpredictable. We'll beat these stupid NPCs soon."

The thought makes a grin threaten to split Tomura's face in half.

Tomura's always been good at learning the patterns of game bosses, and he *loves* seeing them die by his hand.

Izuku doesn't know who started screaming until he feels his throat ache. He shuts himself up by slamming a hand over himself, shuddering when he has to move his arm under the body of the Hero Killer. Oh, *God*—the body of Stain, of the *Hero Killer*, is collapsed *on him*, blood and drool pouring from his mouth and soaking Izuku's costume. Stain is still warm. Izuku can feel him. (Is that why he knew when Stain stopped breathing?)

Izuku's shoving the, the—the corpse, oh God the *corpse*—off of him before he knows it, hands shaking violently. He wastes no time scrambling away, digging the heels of his shoes into the ground as he gets up. The weight that was on Izuku's lap lifts because Stain's side was just barely touching it, and now he's not, and Izuku stares and stares because maybe this man would've been fine had he and Todoroki and Iida been a little softer and Stain didn't move. But if they *hadn't*, if they'd been kinder for even a second, all three of them would be *dead*.

His ears are ringing. His ears are ringing. Izuku can't focus.

He turns to the side, narrowly avoiding someone's shoes as he finally throws up.

They've murdered him. Oh God, they've *murdered someone*.

A hand is on his back, patting it. Izuku flinches so fiercely it feels like he's *spasming*, lurching away from that hand with bile dripping down his chin. "I—I, I d-d-d-d—I *don't*," he says, and his voice sounds so hoarse. How long was he screaming? "I'm, I, I—"

He sways, vision blurring. "Midoriya," someone calls; it could be Todoroki or Iida or even Gran Torino, but all Izuku can hear is the ringing and all he can feel is the fading warmth on his legs and, and—

—and Izuku passes out into the arms of merciful sleep.

"Oh, what the literal *shit* happened here?!"

Chiyo's cane thwaps the back of Tommy's head. He hisses, glaring at her for only a second before looking back up to—to whatever the fuck *this* shitshow is.

They're at some random alley, Ekou Street something, he thinks. Before *that*, the two of them had arrived to Hosu itself just some half hour ago. It's about three or four in the morning, but the train conductors and ticket-men, or whoever the hell gave permission for them to board the bullet trains, had allowed them entry. They hadn't said why, but Chiyo had told him something about how Nedzu is terrifying, and Tommy hadn't asked further because he knows.

Anyway, they arrived way too fucking late regardless. In fact, by the time they were there, most of the fires were put out, and people were clearing up the debris and smoke. A few Nomus—two of them, actually—were covered in huge blankets and placed in one area. There were also injured people, but Chiyo healed the worst of it all and had experienced doctors and nurses from her old workplace handle the rest, rushing to this specific alley after heroes said a few things.

(Thank Prime they hadn't stayed. Tommy had to look up at all times; otherwise, he'd see the bodies littered all over the ground from L'Manburg's first couple of wars in place of debris. Tommy, for all that he was strong entering Hosu and dealing with this shit several times before, is still a fucking coward.)

They hadn't hesitated to hustle over to this alley. After all, Chiyo and Tommy been told that this Ekou place had the worst of it—that *that* was where the Hero Killer was defeated.

Tommy breathes in the fresh air, glancing around. Oh, fuck, that's a bloody Nomu right there—nope, not looking at that, not yet. There's a few heroes over there, discussing some shit, and some more over there, and is that Endeavor? Huh. Some policemen stand near the entrance of the alley, which has yellow tape in front of it—like that can block everyone, ha. Chiyo's already moved towards a group of heroes, probably to ask if there's anything she can do, and...

...Shit, there's nothing else that's interesting. He has to look at the body.

With some hesitation, Tommy finally looks at the Nomu's body. And—he can't say it's pretty, but it's also not the worst thing. There's a knife embedded into its back, short, fleshy nubs where wings

probably were, bone exposed between the flesh. It has no legs, only the ends of thighs. There's a weird mask on it's face, too.

And then Tommy's eye locks onto the body that's fallen to the side of it.

Stain. The bastard lies next to a puddle of bile on his other side. There's dried blood on his mouth, and wherever his skin is shown, it's heavily discolored, bruised, and inflamed. Actually—why are his limbs bent a little like that? Is—is his tongue cut off...? No, never mind. All that matters is that Stain was not defeated—the bitch is fucking dead.

Tommy feels a familiar wave of nausea swirl in his gut, the same one that always accompanies him around corpses, but he looks away, and it fades just the slightest.

He shouldn't have looked away. He shouldn't have, but he's ever grateful that he did, because that's the exact moment Tommy's mind picks up "Midoriya" somewhere around where Chiyo's talking.

"Midoriya?!" Tommy exclaims, rushing over to the group. He swallows when all their attention's on him, but continues. "As in, *Izuku* Midoriya? Hero name Valor or Deku? What the hell's *he* gotta do with this?" He thought only *Iida* was in trouble! What the fuck was *this*?!

"Well," one hero says—a blonde with a green and white bodysuit and a red scarf that doesn't fucking look good, "That was the name of one of the three kids who were really injured—" One of *three*?! Fucking hell! "—and got taken to a hospital. All of them were healed, miraculously enough, but... That kid—Valor, you said? Deku sounds like an insult. Either way, he'd thrown up and... didn't look good. If anyone needs healing of any kind, it's those three kids, but him especially." The hero puts a hand to their face, cupping their cheek, while their eyes are troubled as they look down. "I do hope they're all alright."

Oh fuck fuck fuck—"And who were the others? Like, the other kids?"

"Hm? Oh. One of them was Endeavor's son, and the other... I heard them being called 'Iida.'"

Ohhhh *shit*—

"And where are they now?" Tommy demands. Chiyo tugs him back a little by the back of his shirt before he gets too close to the hero.

Said hero pulls at their scarf a little. "Hosu's General Hospital," they reply, and all of a sudden Tommy feels like he can run thousands of miles if it means finding where the hell that is.

"Tommy," Chiyo warns, tapping her cane. He freezes, looking at her. "Don't. If they're at that hospital, they're in safe hands. I know they are. Worked there, remember?"

...Oh. Right. Any hospital Chiyo trusts is of the highest quality.

"Plus," she says, "they won't be awake, dearie. In order for their bodies and minds to start recovering naturally, regardless of what's left of their injuries, they'll be put under drug-induced sleep. They'll need that energy if I'm to heal them, anyway." She smiles at him, patient and understanding. "It is endearing, however, to see how much you care for them."

Tommy flushes brightly but chokes down his instinctual retort.

It takes what feels like forever for Tommy to convince himself to not run off anyway. But he does, and he stays put, feeling more and more bitter about it the longer he does. Yet, that leaves

him *itching* to do something instead of just standing here like he did during the Festival. So, he turns to Chiyo and asks, "Are we gonna fuckin' collect the DNA now, or?"

Chiyo squints at him for a moment. "Yes, let's do that," she decides, breaking away from the group of heroes and walking towards the covered Nomu. Stumbling a little, Tommy hastens to catch up.

As she starts directing Tommy what exactly to collect, he takes out the glass jars and vials and containers he'd brought and prays they're alright.

when izuku wakes up the first time, the world is so, so far.

there's bandages around his gut. around his legs and arms, too. he'd wince if he could, seeing his scars peeking out of the white wrapping, but it's all so numb and he's so used to it and he's just tired. he can't go back to sleep, though—what a weird limbo this is.

izuku thinks he might've had a nightmare, or something. he can't exactly remember it if he did, the tendrils of a not-quite image just out of reach. his fingers clench subconsciously, and he can faintly feel every one of the lines of bandages around them.

he stares. he stares up at the ceiling, thinking of nothing and everything and something all at once. colors pass his vision, peach-like tones and red smears and blue splotches and blond splatters and everything in between. izuku hears his name, sometimes, but he's so tired. he just wants to sleep.

and blessedly, whatever's in the syringes in his arm lets him rest a little longer.

Izuku wakes again, and everything's significantly clearer. His head... pounds a little, and his throat's dry, but he's relatively fine, maybe. Izuku sits up, blinking dazedly when blinding white is all he can see, and waits while his eyes let him distinguish the hospital room. Or a clinic. One of the two, because it's the only plausible area where there'd be IV drips in his arms and that specific stale scent all up in his face.

"Midoriya?!" Someone exclaims, causing Izuku to wince. When the voice talks next, it's significantly lowered, and... that's Iida's voice, right? "Ah, apologies. Are you alright now? Last time you woke, you were unresponsive." Yeah. Straight-to-the-point, as always.

Izuku hums in lieu of an actual answer. "Everything's—heavy," he says, vision finally clearing up. He looks around, finding Todoroki on the bed to his side and Iida diagonally right to him. Both of them are sitting up, probably having been so long before Izuku was. Iida has bandages around his legs, and Todoroki has some over his scarred eye.

The latter hands Izuku a styrofoam cup of water with a straw in it. When he nods his thanks and drinks it, it tastes a little weird. "It has electrolytes," Todoroki explains simply, sipping on his own straw. Iida has one, too, but the styrofoam's translucent enough to where Izuku can see orange in his—he probably has orange juice, then.

Izuku hums again. He chews lightly on the end of the straw. "How long h-have I...?"

"Since you've been out? Two days or so."

What. *What?*

Iida nods with Todoroki, his free hand doing a slow chopping motion. "The doctors deduced that the first time you woke up, you were in a state of shock, still, or dissociation," he says, which explains a lot, but still. Two days, even with Tommy's vial... "Me and Todoroki only needed a day's worth of rest. Don't worry, you haven't missed much, just check-ups and the like."

That... was really dubious. "A-Are you *sure* I haven't missed anything?" He questions. "Like, what about the, uh, the aftermath of the—" Izuku does a vague hand gesture. "Like, not now, but the, uh, the... the murder." His voice lowers to a murmur, a shiver crawling along his spine. Twitching sharply, yet not jostling the IV drips, he dismisses it.

Todoroki shakes his head. "Our phones are in our costumes," he says, tugging at his hospital gown, "and those have been taken for... investigation purposes, I suppose? Or just because we needed to wear these. Either way, we haven't been able to check the news, except for anything the nurses and doctors are willing to give us."

...If they're not willing to say much, then that's not good, is it.

"Well," Iida starts. He hesitates. "I'm sure it'll be alright. At least, for the two of you. I... I was the one who provoked Stain. That won't count as 'self-defense.' If I hadn't done that, then... then we'd all be safe."

"But then Native w-w-would be dead," Izuku retorts, staring at Iida directly in his eyes. "And St-Stain, he'd still be... he'd still be killing others. Heroes are ne-never safe, anyhow; we just... you know, we just have to get used to that. We're supposed t-to get used to it."

"We're first-years," Todoroki adds. He looks at Izuku, then to Iida. "We're allowed to be stupid. Plus, I was the one who—burned Stain's tongue off, and Midoriya helped both of us fight back. If you're getting charged for something, we're all going with you."

Iida reluctantly smiles. It's a small, fragile thing.

"We've done good either way." Todoroki decides, leaning back. "The Hero Killer's down, and we're the ones who did it. That's something we can be proud of—I think. Right?"

"...That is quite pragmatic," Iida comments, "but I suppose so." Izuku, on the other hand, just shrugs.

They fall into a contemplative silence.

"Midoriya," Todoroki starts suddenly. Izuku lifts his head up towards him. "Who is Dusk? You looked surprised when Stain mentioned them, so."

"A-Ah—" They must've heard Stain. Izuku has to word this carefully. Half-truths, remember? No lies. "—he's a vigilante! It's just that, Dusk's a pretty small one who w-w-was from my area, and he went M-MIA out of nowhere, so I was just—you know, surprised that Stain heard about him at all." There! That works, right?

It does, thank God. Todoroki nods in understanding, and then they're back under that silence. But it seems unbearable, all of a sudden, as if Todoroki flicked a switch to cause a flood in Izuku's mind—

And Izuku blurts out, "Why didn't Stain kill me?" Before anyone can interrupt, even himself, he keeps going. "I-I—you saw me, both of you, I was... I was right under Stain. Several times. He n-n-ne—nearly cut my..." His hand without the IV drip in it reaches up, subconsciously, to gently circle where

the small knife Stain threw should've hit. "W-We were left alive. Do you think that, that he was... that he still gave us mercy because we're students, or to leave a *message*, or..."

Right then and there, the door to the hospital room opens. Izuku looks up, seeing... Gran Torino, Manual, with Endeavor nowhere in sight—and then he freezes at a familiar and very, *very* angry face.

"Youuu motherfucker," Tommy starts, pointing right at Izuku, and he laughs sheepishly, already resigning himself to a painful death.

But then Tommy sighs, tiredly, and slumps like all the fight's drained out of him. "I'll fuckin' get to you later," he grunts, stepping aside. When he looks back up, there's a smirk on his face that Izuku knows spells out more doom. "He'll get to you first, though."

And then Hosu's Chief of Police walks in.

Whatever good humor Tommy's had fades instantly because of how suddenly fucking serious everyone looks. Which, well, he can't blame them—Tommy was filled in on the whole situation by Tsuraga-something (which Tommy will be referring to as the Chief because no way in *hell* is he remembering his name). At the scene of Stain's death, there's apparently a shit ton of evidence that Izuku, Iida, and Todoroki caused the injuries that led to the Hero Killer's death.

Personally, Tommy sees no problem in what they did because that guy was trying to kill them, but he doesn't have the full story so he can't say shit. Also, he doesn't know the laws here. Doesn't even get the concept of it, sometimes, because both of the SMPs he was in were near-lawless, besides a few things that were just basic common sense, and even those weren't upheld well. The wars can attest to that.

Tommy's fingers dig into his arm, dragging him back to the present.

"You two may remain seated, woof," the Chief tells Iida, who attempted to get up despite the bandages on his legs, and Izuku, who still has needles in his arm. Tommy successfully manages to stifle his snort at the "woof" silently. "You are the U.A. students involved in the Hero Killer's downfall, yes?"

He doesn't wait for confirmation; of course these're the fucks involved. "Regarding the Hero Killer's death," the Chief begins. It's so—nonchalant, near apathetic, that Tommy nearly forgets the severity of killing the Hero Killer. "There were severe burns, slight frostbite, broken bones, and more on his body. Stain's body has since been removed from the scene.

"With the rise of Quirks, there has been high importance placed on leadership and responsibility to make sure that Quirks are not used so leisurely as weapons, woof. 'Heroes' emerged to fill that gap. An individual's use of force and power that can easily kill others—actions that normally would be appropriate to denounce—to be accepted officially is thanks to early heroes who follows the ethics and rules of being a 'hero,' woof.

"Thus, even up against the Hero Killer, for uncertified individuals to cause injury with their Quirks without specific instruction from their guardians or supervision is a clear violation of the rules." The Chief's eyes harden. "Especially in the case that the injured sustains wounds so damaging they die from it."

Sheesh. It was the fucking Hero Killer, though—surely there had to be some fuckin'... Tommy doesn't know, exception? If they didn't use their Quirks, they'd probably die, right? And heroes would be too

busy dealing with the Nomu chaos. The fuck were they supposed to do?

But... Tommy's learnt his lesson about talking back a long time ago, especially when it came to shit like this. So he stays quiet.

"The three of you," the Chief continues, despite the growing shock on Izuku and Todoroki's faces, "and the pro heroes Endeavor, Manual, and Gran Torino must receive strict punishment." Then, looking down slightly, the Chief sighs tiredly. "If Stain were incapacitated, this would be much simpler. As it is, Stain's death is something that can't be simply covered up. Thus, once this hospital clears the three of you of injury, you will be detained, woof. Most likely, at least one of you will be charged with manslaughter based on the injuries and evidence at the incident."

...*Shit*. What the *hell*. Prison...?

Tommy grips his arm tightly, pressing it in a random beat. He wasn't told this. Of *course* he wasn't. He's not supposed to be here at all, really; Chiyo gave him permission to be standing here in her place, as the sole person who has an ambrosia supply. But, fuck, that doesn't matter now, does it? It's just—*prison*. They're going to prison.

(Unwelcoming lava; dark obsidian; a single glowstone; decaying potatoes; books, ink, quills; a clock: tick, tick, tick; the explosion that trapped him there; a mask, smiling; green eyes, watching; two sides huddled in opposite corners—

Tommy remembers that the ventilation system broke sometime in that prison; the temperatures stopped regulating right, and the potatoes they got would rot faster when they hadn't felt hungry. They'd gotten so used to it that they could ignore the smells and the cold and the heat, but to Tommy, it got harder to breathe some time before the, the shit that took him here, to *this* fucking server.

Was *that* why Tommy snapped instead, and what caused Dream to, to—to fucking bash his Prime damn head in? That, that tight feeling he got so used to, a mimicry of rage, aching, constricting like a set of strings around his heart, closing in and in and in until Tommy ran out of—)

Air. Tommy breathes quietly, in and out, and does not show his fear.

Todoroki scowls, suddenly, and Tommy nearly recoils. The rage in his eye is so intense Tommy can remember times when Wil or Techno or Phil directed it at him. (Tommy can certainly remember how Dream's eyes glowed with it like radiation—but he can't think about it here, not now, and never, preferably, so he dismisses that image and the thousands of others it's curated and does not think about it.

He'll have to ask what Japanese prisons are like. Maybe Tommy can break the three of them out or some shit, eh? Would be poggers.

...Prime, none of that is helping.) Tommy reaches in his pocket and fiddles with the edge of his communicator.

"Even when we hadn't *truly* killed Stain?" The fire-ice user snarls, cold as ice yet passionate as fire. Izuku reaches out to him a little, but reluctantly pulls his hand back down. "The only reason he died was because he moved on his own. And if Iida hadn't used his Quirk, he and Native would be dead. If me or Midoriya hadn't jumped in with our own, we'd all be *dead*. All the other heroes were busy and far out. How else do we stall for them when Stain had swords? Are you saying to follow the rules and let people *die*?"

"Are you saying that it is okay to bend them because you are an exception, or that so long as everything turns out fine—better, even—it's okay to ignore them?" The Chief responds practically, mercilessly. Prime, he's fucking *stoic*. "The rules are in place for a reason, and there cannot be exceptions. If there are, then that is not fair to thousands of others with cases that may be similar to yours, showing favoritism among heroes, woof."

...Is this what led Techno to anarchy, or something? This lack of restrictions on what someone can do, alongside the unlimited freedom from rules that a government enacts, all for the sake of some semblance of justice? Or maybe, anarchy removed what was wrong and right, turning it into who did what and if they get karma.

Tommy runs a hand through his hair lightly, tugging on a few strands. He zones back into the conversation soon enough.

Todoroki's scowl's gotten deeper. "Isn't it a hero's job to *save people?!'*"

"Todoroki!" Izuku cuts in, voice high-pitched and panicked. But the Chief just shakes his head softly, eyes closed.

"I suppose, with all of the attacks on U.A., that the teachers have had no time to truly teach you what it means to be a hero," he says. That seems to snap something inside of Todoroki, who stalks forward. The only reason he halts is because of Izuku and Iida physically pulling him back, along with Gran Torino moving forward, hand out like that can halt him. Tommy jerks his wrist sharply, inventory flying open, and hovers over where he knows he put a shield.

"Hear him out until the end," Gran Torino asks. And from the way Todoroki stares at him for a long moment before taking a step back, he's willing to listen.

"...That is the official opinion of the police, woof," says the Chief, as if he wasn't about to be burnt to a crisp or some shit by Endeavor's son. He adopts something that could be sorrowful. "Once again, if Stain were incapacitated, I would be more than willing to offer a solution wherein no one is punished: hiding this as a whole. However, that is unfortunately not available, and though the public will applaud your actions, the best outcome is that your sentence in court is reduced and the Hero licenses of your mentors will be revoked only temporarily, woof."

"For what it's worth..." The Chief... *bows*. Tommy thinks that the Chief isn't one to do that lightly. "...I'm truly sorry."

The silence that reigns is a heavy one. Todoroki clenches his hands and lowers his head as if he wants to punch something. Midoriya looks resigned yet tearful. Gran Torino and Manual look blank, Chief Tsugaramae rising from his bow with an equally stony expression, so contrasting to his bow. Tommy's clutching his arm in a way that tells Tenya that something isn't right, that maybe he's on the verge of the dissociation episode from the Sports Festival.

And Tenya... Tenya looks at Manual's blank face and thinks that if he had just listened like he's done for most of his life, no one would be in these positions. So if he's going to prison, then he might as well apologize beforehand.

Without hesitation, Tenya does. He gets up despite the immediate protests of mostly everyone in the room, stumbling towards Manual before doing his own bow. "I'm sorry, too," he says, holding it for what could be longer than necessary.

Manual sighs. Tenya both wants and doesn't want to see his expression—okay, maybe he does since Manual's hit his head lightly. "What's done is done," the hero decides. "You know now, so... don't do that again." Tenya nods as he rises, smiling hesitantly but gratefully at Manual, who, to his surprise, returns it with ease.

Behind him, Tenya can hear his friends bowing, too. "I-I'm sorry," Midoriya mumbles. When Tenya glances back, he's managed to maneuver himself to where he's sitting upright, IVs precariously still in his arm, and able to do a half-bow. "And, and thank you for letting us kn-know. And for trying, at least."

"Sorry," Todoroki manages, curt and holding back a lot of anger. It's not directed at the Hosu Chief of Police anymore, which is good.

Chief Tsugaramae gives them all what Tenya can only assume is a small smile. "I believe I should be thanking the three of you," he counters, "for assisting in maintaining the peace of this city." And then he bows, *again*—Tenya doesn't think that'll ever *not* be surprising, that the Hosu Chief of Police bowed to them at all.

"...Please start with that next time," Todoroki says. Tenya takes that moment to walk back to his bed, but as he does, he can't help but smile a little more, hearing the slightly sheepish edge Todoroki's tone has.

Oddly enough, despite the circumstances, Tenya thinks he feels a little lighter. The prison part... it's not something he'll ever be happy about, even if he still thinks that he, out of the three of them, deserves it, but... Tenya isn't sharing this burden alone. He has people who've forgiven him, who still believe he can grow, and with that support, he'll move on.

When the police and the other pro heroes leave, locking the door, *that's* when Tommy takes his shot.

"The three of you," he starts. "Where the *hell* is the vial." Iida and Todoroki look at him with even more confusion; they've had those expressions on their faces ever since Tommy's stayed here. Izuku, on the other hand, straightens up in his peripherals, patting the spot where a pocket should be—and then his face falls.

"Oh," the reckless motherfucker breathes, "I—I—oh my God, I... I think it's in my hero costume, o-o-or I dropped it somewhere during the, uh, the fight." The same hero costume and fight scene that are both being investigated. Tommy covers his face with his hands and sighs.

Fuck. Okay. None of that was avoidable. ...*Shit*.

Tommy peeks through his fingers. "Do you two know what the fuck it was?" He asks, directing the question towards Iida and Todoroki. The latter raises an eyebrow higher, but the former pauses, contemplative.

"...It healed my wounds," Iida recalls. Idly, his fingers rake across his bandages. "You had only given me one vial, so it was split about eighty-twenty between me and Midoriya since my wounds were more serious and I was—was closer to death. But when I took a look at them during the fight, they were scarred over. And even now they still hurt sometimes, when I move. Todoroki hadn't had a chance to get some; he re-cauterized his scar where a minor cut was."

Oh *fuck*, that's not good. Tommy thought Iida was the only one who'd be hurt, so he thought a single vial was enough, but clearly it fucking wasn't. Tommy sighs again and lowers his hands. "What I'm

about to tell you two is known only to a select group of people," he says impulsively. He takes another breath, thinks that Chiyo's *not* going to like this, and continues. "That was what I'm calling ambrosia. One vial does a shit ton of healing, and I've a limited supply. You can't say shit since it's an OP thing, alright, and if word gets out, people're gonna fuckin' *hound* me. It basically heals you for a limited amount of time; the pink vapor shit is, like, residue or whatever."

Tommy frowns, suddenly, looking to Izuku, because part of Iida's argument doesn't make sense. "Did it scar for you?" He asks. When Izuku hesitates but nods, slowly, Tommy frowns deeper.

"It's not supposed to leave scars," he states. Tommy's an exception since he got hurt so repeatedly the shit started to not heal his skin, but it still healed everything else, so he takes it as a W. But for them... "No, that's not supposed to happen. Iida I can understand, maybe, because the effects could've worn out and not reached his skin or fixed his shit entirely. Stain must've done a number on you. But Izuku?" Tommy shakes his head, beginning to pace as he nearly talks to himself. "Twenty percent of that shit is enough to heal a gut wound, especially one made by something as thin and light as Stain's blade."

Izuku's face scrunches in confusion. "How d-did you know that my wounds were—"

"Me and Recov took *so* many fucking trains here," Tommy interrupts. "And then we got a shit ton of nurses from Hosu, and we fixed shit up, gathered Nomu DNA, and helped other people. I managed to get an excuse to see you, and the docs here gave me your condition—but none of that shit." Waving his hand as if dismissing the topic, Tommy runs that same hand through his hair and keeps pacing. "It's not... ambrosia's fuckin' *strong*, alright? Your body doesn't, fucking... *adapt* to it instantly, let's say. I've used it for years back when I had a good supply, and it's never failed me. But Izuku, your wound should be fucking gone. There should be no trace. You've used it far less than me, and it takes years before it stops healing scars since your body's adjusted, and..."

Maybe it was a matter of age? Tommy was a crisp eighteen, Izuku only a mere fifteen. But, no, during the USJ, Aizawa's wounds... they were gone, and *fuck*, that wouldn't match up. And Iida's about fifteen, too, probably, but his shit's nearly healed; the full vial would've given him an entire recovery, like it should've with the wounds of his magnitude. If it can't be age, and it can't be the amount of times used, then...

Tommy stops abruptly, hands lightly tugging on his hair roots. Maybe it was because of the server itself?

Oh, that Prime-damned stupid fucking *wanker* of an *Admin*—

"...at? What? Tommy, what's going on?" Izuku's voice brings Tommy back to the present. He lets go of his hair, brushing the gold strands out of his visible eye.

Tommy huffs. "It's... nothing important," he says, and that's a clear fucking lie, but what the hell's he supposed to say? That oh, because of a being they don't even know of, this server's laws or whatever the hell are diluting the effects of golden apples? "Just—I'll deal with something later, it's none of your business."

Tommy isn't sure how Todoroki can convey such doubt with that same fucking eyebrow raise. "Doesn't look like 'nothing important.'"

"Oh, shut the fuck your mouth."

And just like that, the tension's broken.

Running a hand through his hair one last time, Tommy sighs. He's been doing it as often as Aizawa, lately, and that's saying something. "I'll fuckin' handle it," he grumbles, crossing his arms. Now for the original purpose of his being here. "Anyway, before I got sidetracked, I'm supposed to be saying that 'cause of the ambrosia, you lot will be here for... half a week, according to Recov. With her constant heals, the shit the ambrosia didn't fix will be healed, and then you'll stay for more check-ups in case there's any adverse side-effects, and..."

And then it's... detainment time. Because if the Chief was right, then there's no chance they'll get out of a sentence to prison—what Tommy can only assume means that they'll be in one for Prime knows how long.

He shakes his head sharply, ignoring the confused looks he gets. "I'll let you know what was on the news hours ago," Tommy decides, taking out his communicator. "There's no TV here, and you got your phones taken with your costumes, too, proolly. The nurses here can gossip, yeah, but I bet they've been ranting about 'that *handsome guy* down the block' to you like they have all the damn time when they're on break. Here, these're some pics I took of the articles on Chiyo's phone—no, this isn't a phone, this is a *communicator*, those are two *different fucking things*—"

HERO KILLER: DEAD AT HOSU

U.A. STUDENTS KILL HERO KILLER?!

ENDEAVOR'S SON KILLS STAIN

U.A.'S THIRD INVOLVEMENT IN VILLAINY

HERO KILLER GIVEN REVENGE BY SECOND INGENIUM

Iida is the one who tells Tommy to stop showing them the articles.

Izuku stares into the ceiling for a long time after Tommy leaves, having forgotten to ask about how Stain knew Tommy. But, well, other questions plague his mind anyway, ones far more confusing.

What does it mean to save? What does it mean to be a hero?

If a hero kills a villain, does that make them better than one?

(Why is it that the only thing that separates the two is whether or not they kill?)

He finds no answers in the stars outside the window, nor in the white tiled ceiling, nor in the blood that spills from Stain's mouth in his dreams.

23:34

<big man> Hey

<big man> Hey Nedzu

<rat man> Yes?

<big man> The hell goes on in a Japanese prison

<rat man> ...Well, I'd like to believe that it's like any other kind of prison, but the one time I've gotten to visit one, it was far quieter than you'd think.

<big man> Was it cruel

<big man> Are like

<big man> Minors separated from adults or something

<rat man> Yes, they are.

<rat man> If you are asking this because of the charges that Iida, Midoriya, and Todoroki will be facing, then

<rat man> Well, I cannot assure you that they'll be safe, but if any of them are sent to prison, they will not die there, mark my words.

<big man>

<big man> Alright

<big man> I'll trust you on that.

<rat man> Thank you, Tommy.

And then, all too soon, Izuku, Iida, and Todoroki are given the clear.

Chapter End Notes

WOOOOOOOOOOOO CH 30 LET SGOOOOOO BABYYYY

god i can't believe i'm this far, or that anyone reading this is this far

uhhhok ok so because i'm halfway done w editing on ao3 while i'm writing this early, by the time this chapter's posted, i'll HOPEFULLY be done w ao3 edits. so that means Wattpad's getting updated soon. so if you're following me on wattpad and you see a lotta updates any time at all, it's cause of that,,,,,

also !!! i . did not consider legal consequences when killing off stain but. WHATEVER

but i have a plan for it i think !!! it's like a real stretch and stuff but ,,,, there's a thing !!

(what? noo i totally didn't forget that the police covered the 3 boys involvement in the stain incident up, what are you Sayinngggggg? :]]]] plus that downplays the significance of stain's death sOOOOOO)

uhhh so because of me trynna work out the rest of the legal stuff + hOW TO WRITE A TRIAL (oh god i didnt think i'd be doing that for a fic likw this whyyyy) the next chapter'll take longer i think ahhjjaae,,,,, sorry

anyway ! i do hope you've enjoyed this chapter regardless, and that you've been well-fed, comfortable, and hydrated :]]] will see you next time, and thank you, if you're here, for sticking 'round this long !!!

blindfold.

Chapter Notes

though never explicitly stated, it's implied here that denki has adhd—if i've misrepresented it in any way, please lmk and i will fix it asap !!!!

anyway this is about 9k of pure build up. any mistakes are mine because this is not beta'd but i will not edit any of it until im done w the next 5 chapters or smth because . research is exhausting and this is my 4th update this month (i think i've written 20k total this week and the last idk)

anyway enjoy smile :]

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tsuyu hasn't been able to stop watching the news in days. Her mentor's worried, especially when she doesn't come down to eat sometimes because she thinks her fear will churn the food out anyway. Her peers are worried, too, knocking on her room's door to make sure she's even living. She's glad, sometimes, that everyone's internships are being lengthened due to this so that her family never has to see her wallowing away like this. It's not healthy, Tsuyu knows, and yet. And yet.

The newscaster's voice rings in her ears. Tsuyu can remember their every word: "Stain the Hero Killer was found dead in Ekou Street District Four during the Hosu Pandemonium, as people are now dubbing the terrorist attacks done just a few days ago. Police believe three of U.A.'s hero course students are at fault; specifically Iida Tenya, known as Tenya, Todoroki Shoto, known simply as Shoto, and Midoriya Izuku, known as Valor or Deku. As of now, they are recovering from the injuries they have sustained from the incident in Hosu's General Hospital, and—"

Because Tsuyu doesn't want to know more, she stops the memory there. Zoning back into the present, Tsuyu finds her eyes burning, for once, having been staring at the light of her phone so much the world seems too dark when she looks up. Her hands are shaking as they set her phone face-down; they have been ever since this all began, and it's only worsened with time.

She knows what will happen to them, anyways, from snippets of audio and lines of text weaving into her ears and infecting her mind. Iida, Todoroki, and Midoriya will be detained as soon as they are released from the hospital. Despite everything, they will go to court. Of course they will; they've broken the law, even though following the rules in their circumstances would've led to death, and their fates are in the hands of a judge.

Tsuyu has never felt this terrified for those outside her family in her life.

She isn't even close to any of them, she knows. Tsuyu knows the girls better than any of the boys. She's more accustomed to calmer nights spent visiting each other and painting their nails and talking about heroes than, than a *fraction* of anything Midoriya's been through. And yet. And yet...

God, Tsuyu's just so *tired* of her class being in danger like this. She's sure that her year is abnormal for U.A., even compared to other years, but she's also positive third years don't feel the same heartache she does. They've just—everyone, Midoriya *especially*, have been in danger several times in these

first few months of U.A., most definitely more than what an average hero goes through in half a decade, and they're fifteen and sixteen, God, they're all *fifteen and sixteen* and they've all almost *died* and Tsuyu's heart *hurts*.

Tsuyu's scared. Tsuyu's *terrified*. Tsuyu wants nothing more than Mom to wrap her in blankets and Dad to make her favorite drink and her younger siblings to give her their favorite plushies, even when Samidere^[1] says that he has no favorite and that he's too old for them, and for them all to hug her, and give hugs to everyone else, too.

(If this is what heroes feel constantly, she... Tsuyu feels a little less sure that she wants to be a hero.)

Tsuyu snuffles, hugging her own plush to her chest: a large frog with an oversized pastel cardigan. She buries her face in its head, breathing in the scent of home. And then she looks up with a face of determination, clutching her beloved toy closer to her, thin tear tracks drying on her face. Tsuyu squeezes it once, twice, and then sets it down gently on her bed, gets up, and starts walking out her room.

She hesitates when her phone buzzes, a familiar tune that'll alert her of another article about this all. But, firming her resolve, Tsuyu opens the door to her temporary room.

Tsuyu has two little siblings, but sometimes, she thinks that Class 1-A and her peers in this internship have become a part of it, too. And just like she would for her siblings, Tsuyu will not let her sorrow or fears get a hold of her entire being. In this chaos, she'll be strong for them all—if not for her own sake.

Denki knows he's a bit of a dunderhead sometimes. Most times, really, according to mostly everyone, but at least the Bakusquad and his class mean it jokingly—he hopes. And, well, thinking that the Hero Killer, of all people, is pretty cool is... somewhere at the top of the stupid things he's done. Besides siding with Mineta on bothering the girls, of course; that'll be number one for a while.

Denki's huddled up between pillows and a thick blanket right now, all lights off and fidget toy between his fingers. He's trying his *damndest* to pay attention to the TV his mentor had in this guest room because, well, his phone will distract him from what's going on, and the TV's bright enough to captivate him, and at least the remote doesn't light up.

Get back on track. The whole point of him staying up despite it being so late into the night it's nearly morning is because the Hero Killer's *dead*, and Todoroki, Midoriya, and Iida are at the center of it. They were involved in actually murdering him, and it's... made Denki realize that this is a lot more... *more* than he thought. The Hero Killer wasn't cool, he was a murderer—and one that three of his classmates assisted in the death of.

There's already a ton of theories and conspiracy surrounding the entire thing, which was what initially led Denki to setting his phone down. He got sucked down a spiral of absurd what-ifs and hypotheticals these past few days, and some of them were actually interesting, like the one that said—

Something clicks in his hands. Denki looks down, seeing his thumb flicking a switch back and forth on the weird little fidget cube thing he has, and then he looks up to the TV again.

Oh. He... missed a bit of what the news was reporting: more stuff about the condition of Hosu, as well as—oh, *shit*, they've been *detained*?

Denki leans forward a little, the clicks from his fidgeting growing more constant, and tries to pay attention again.

Toshinori helps some heroes lift a few piles of rubble, grinning when they nod or say their thanks. He moves it to the side to where it didn't disturb the new infrastructure of once-broken buildings, courtesy of Tommy (do not think about his reaction, do not think about his reaction), and also to where any civilians won't be disrupted by it. It's... the least he can do, for reaching here right when the aftermath of this entire situation began.

The reason why Toshinori didn't get here as early as he should've is entirely his fault. It's not because the house he was in was far from Hosu, no—All Might can cover the distance between the two easily. It's that... well. He was wallowing, he guesses.

It's the exact same thing Toshinori did for Nana, the first few days after she died—after Gran Torino forced him to leave her behind. It's just. He felt a magnitude of loss and failure so large it swallowed him whole back then, and it's returned with a vengeance now, hitting harder after he first read Gran Torino's letter. Even now, days later, it pulses with his wound.

Back then, he knew that Nana would've wanted him to smile and try moving on, so Toshinori did. Eventually, it worked. But—this loss, this failure, is very, very different. It's to where Toshinori... doesn't know, exactly, what he is mourning. The bond between him and Izuku that was never really there? The dreams of a child he nearly killed, now patched up before Toshinori can even apologize? Or maybe the difference between how good he was in the past, and how he is now? All of that?

Doesn't change that Izuku (does he even get a right to call him that?) probably doesn't forgive him. Who would, even for someone as kind as him?

Toshinori hasn't visited Hosu's General Hospital for that specific reason. Izuku—Midoriya—he doesn't need to face him on top of everything he's already going through. (And maybe you'll never have this talk ever, so go speak to him now, you silly goose, Nana would say, he thinks. But Toshinori is not a good man, he is a coward, and so here he'll stay, helping to clean up the aftermath.)

But... even without that confrontation, there is something Toshinori can do: start *trying*, from here on out, even when Midoriya doesn't know he is.

Toshinori will try to be more honest about his past Quirklessness, should Midoriya ever want to speak to him in the future. Toshinori will try to not let these mistakes define him, even when everything still hurts. Toshinori will try to be better.

...That's not enough, for what he's done. Toshinori *will* be more honest, *will* grow from his mistakes, and he *will* be better, because he was late for this and too late for Izuku, too, and he won't let it happen again.

"Oi, Bakugo! Relax your face, won't you? It's scaring off everyone."

"It always fuckin' does," Katsuki grumbles, almost adding "*and I like it that way, too.*" Because these fuckers are so damn *needy* of him, and he's dealt with those slimy fucks who tried to get into his good graces in Aldera. And honestly? Right now, he barely gives a damn about their shitty fucking opinions and fashion and whatever the hell they're upset about now, because not only has Katsuki currently deemed them worthless, but there's an extra sheen of gel on his fucking hair that is driving him insane, and he can't stop thinking about Hosu.

Specifically, he can't stop thinking about shitty Deku and Glasses and Icy-Hot, and how everyone keeps fucking saying they're all going to jail. It's even reached Best Jeanist's agency, of all fucking places, and these fuckers never stop talking about whoever the hell Ru Paul and his damn drag race and all about Katsuki needing to look good and nice and act *polite* and putting him in tight jeans that don't feel good and—

Fuck, he wishes the internships would end early, even if he had to go back to his mother. Their voices have infected him like little parasites in his mind, like back when Katsuki was more *pathetic* and actually listened to his mother during the fashion modeling shit. All of this is worsening his mood, because everything is fucking shitty *here*, it's shitty at *U.A.*, it's shitty at *home*, and it's the shittiest at *Hosu*.

His hands fill with the beginnings of smoke. Katsuki clenches his fists shut subconsciously, waiting for the sparks of explosions he can feel simmering under his skin to fade. (He shouldn't be. In fact, doctors have told him that he should be using his Quirk so that he doesn't fucking die—something about his blood and nitroglycerin, he's too angry to remember.

But—nothing is in his control. Everything is shitty *here*, at *U.A.*, at *home*, and it's the shittiest at *Hosu*, and Katsuki can't stop fucking thinking about Hosu. He used to be in control of the kids at Aldera all the damn time. This is different, new—unpredictable.)

Katsuki smothers the smoke until it turns into steam, and then, nothing. And, vividly, he remembers the first time Hosu was shown on screen, buildings burning and collapsing like something in a movie, and also of the aftermath, with vapors still rising into the air days later. It didn't feel real; doesn't, even now. And Deku, Glasses, and Icy-Hot being *arrested* doesn't feel real, either. Them killing the Hero Killer nearly doesn't compute in his head.

For the first time since he accidentally blew up an All Might figure out of excitement, Katsuki's hands start shaking in... in fear.

Holy shit. Katsuki is fucking *terrified*.

He's—he's not fucking sure if it's an amalgamation of everything, or some undecipherable fear for—God, Katsuki can't believe he's thinking this—for Icy-Hot and Glasses and Deku.

Shouldn't he be laughing or some shit about the irony of those three being arrested in particular? That fucking *Deku*, smiling and flustered and different, who charmed the damn class while still being a damn *creep*, is the first one out of him and Katsuki to be arrested? It should be funny. Katsuki should be boasting. If he were back in Aldera, he totally would be.

So why the hell are his hands fucking *shaking*?

Katsuki closes them, steeling the muscles so that they fucking stop. And they do—for only a few seconds, before they go right back to, to trembling weakly, so Katsuki shoves them in his pockets (small, far too fucking small, with the leftover nitroglycerin-mixed sweat from the last few times he's done this still clinging to the walls of the fabric, *why* are jeans like this—) before anyone sees.

This internship drove him over the fucking edge. It has to be. Yeah. Katsuki's been stressed and pushed out of his comfort zone far too many fucking times this past—what, week and a half? He wants to wear comfortable shit again, wants to pop sparks whenever he wants, wants to curse the shit out of anything and everything he wants—but he can't here, and that's the thing that's making him so—so *scared*...?

Not scared. Uncomfortable, then. Maybe Katsuki fucking—maybe Best Jeanist's agency reminds him too much of the past and it's driving him crazy, like he thought before.

(But he's gotten over it all a long time ago...?)

—*SHUT UP.*)

Katsuki *seethes*. He lowers his head and doesn't move until his hands stop fucking shaking, even when people call for him.

Shouta wants a raise. Actually, he thinks he deserves one.

He sighs tiredly in 1-A's empty classroom, nearly deciding to bring out his sleeping bag and nap here, but going against it at the last moment. U.A.'s other courses are still going on besides both hero courses—the hero they've interned with has been alerted to hold their students with them until this all blows over. If they were sent back to U.A., all concentrated in one spot, then the press outside would certainly devour them whole.

Shouta buries his head in his arms like a makeshift shield against the world. Though he desperately wants to see the state of all his students, at least like this the students' mentors and their peers can shield them all from the press... somewhat. Helps instead of U.A.'s staff being spread too thinly and families being bombarded and possibly doxxed—they've already got one less than they should, and the kids' families are already stressed enough from what's happened this year alone.

It's not... *the* best solution, but. It's the best U.A. has right now.

(How *laughable*. U.A. is meant to be—and always *had been*, until now—the safest place for kid-heroes on this side of Japan to grow up and learn, yet they're better off spread around so that no one can find them. Shouta is supposed to be a *teacher*, yet he's already failed to protect his kids four times. Once at the USJ, once at the Sports Festival, once post-Stain fight, and once right *now*, where his students are probably scared and isolated and Shouta is stuck... *here*.)

None of this changes the fact that the press have been outside for several days—increasingly at night, too—and at this point, they should be able to sue every single one of those broadcast stations, right? Shouta hopes they can—hopes that those in other courses will, too, because the press is blocking them from leaving as well. His migraine has been raging ever since the first crowds got blocked by U.A.'s defense mechanisms, as if they've not learnt from the last time they did this.

...Fuck. Surely there can't be an attack on them now. The villains are dealing with their own shortage of Nomus from their attack on Hosu, and the class that they want to attack is spread far and wide across Japan. Plus, they're after *All Might*, not after who he teaches, and the only reason they attacked Shouta's students in the first place was to get All Might out. It's illogical, for them to attack now.

Shouta doesn't have enough eye drops for this. He needs to buy another pack soon, but the press won't let him at this rate.

Shouta sighs again, straightening up. His chest pangs slightly at the sight of his still-empty classroom when his class should be here, laughing with each other, dragging Tommy into their shenanigans, still happy and carefree and *children*.

He can't think of that. All he can do is just—hold off the press like the rest of the staff, wait for the verdict of the trial, and hope this'll end soon. (Hope that, despite everything, things will turn to some

semblance of normal. God knows they need it.)

PART 1 OF RECORDED INTERVIEW [5]

Date: June 2, 2XXX (Tuesday)

Duration: 1 hr, 3 mins

Location: Hosu City Police Station

No. of Pages: 39

T: Detective Tsukauchi Naomasa

N: The Tribal Hero, Native

T: This interview is being tape recorded and there are security cameras in the corners of the room. I am Tsukauchi Naomasa, otherwise known as True Man, and I'm based at [REDACTED]. I use he and him pronouns, and I work in the Police Force. The date is Tuesday 6th June 2XXX and according to my watch it is 9:03. This interview is being conducted at the Tribal Hero, Native's Agency, specifically at his office. No one else is in the room at this time. What is your full name and pronouns?

N: My name is Toda Yasuhiro also known as Native. I use he and him pronouns.

T: For convenience sake you'll be referred to as Native. Is that fine?

N: Yes. For things like these I think I might prefer it

T: Alright. May I get your date of birth and work phone number?

N: (hums) I was born on 3.11.XX. My work phone number is [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED]

T: Alright. Where do you live presently?

MI: [REDACTED]

T: Okay, thank you. Now before we begin I need you to sign this rights waiver which states... You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to talk to a lawyer prior to any questioning or making of any statements and have them present with you while you are being questioned. If you can't afford to hire a lawyer one will be appointed by the court to represent you before questioning if you desire one. You may stop questioning or make any statements at any time by refusing to answer further or by requesting to consult with an attorney prior to continuing with questioning or the making of any statements

T: Sign right here where it says, "I have read the statement of my rights and I understand what my rights are. I'm willing to make a statement and answer questions. I do not want a lawyer at this time. I understand and know what I'm doing. No promises or threats have been made to me and no pressure or coercion of any kind have been used against me."

N: Anything else I need to know?

T: Not much. Just that you are allowed to leave if you become stressed or overwhelmed at any point and if you say any lies I'm allowed to ask questions about them and press for answers

N: Will keep that in mind

T: Alright then, let's start. How did you get involved in this incident?

T: ...*Strings* are what "changed" Todoroki's Quirk?

N: Not changed, swapped. Traded places with each other. They were thin; the only reason I saw them were because my Quirk was active and I'd given myself enhanced eyesight by accident. I don't know what caused the strings but if they weren't there Stain would've been frozen not burned

T: Noted. Continue, please

N: After that...

Unfortunately, Tommy is *Very* Much Fucking There when the police show up to take Iida, Izuku, and Todoroki away. Actually, he's nearly the one who went up to them and announced it. But he figured that the police would do that shit for him, and Tommy is, is scared out of his Prime damned *mind*, and he doesn't want to make them more fearful than they already are, and—and if *they're* fucking scared, there's *no* damn way Tommy's gonna be calm.

Tommy breathes, running a shaking hand through his hair.

He's become a damn pussy, it seems. And most days Tommy would come up with excuses, bullshit like how he's still impacted by the DreamSMP even now, and how he can't fucking do what he wants here because it's all laws and rules and morals, but... Tommy is fucking eighteen. He's three years older than Izuku, he wasn't the one who killed Stain, and this entire fucking time, he's panicking more than Izuku has. Is. *Whatever*.

Point is, Tommy needs to man up and stop being a coward.

Because he's fucking—Tommy should be used to this. He *is* used to this.

Yet, even with the police having left moments ago and this being his last chance to see them all, he's *still* fucking hesitating to open the door. His hands are shaking and his heart is thudding and this is the last chance for him to see them Prime fucking damn it just—

He knocks twice, waiting only for a few seconds when he opens the Prime-damned door.

Izuku, Todoroki, and Iida's heads snap towards him instantly. They're out of their hospital gowns, wearing some plain t-shirts and long pants. Though Todoroki looks blank as ever, Iida looks fucking *miserable*, and Izuku is as pale as a sheet. Most likely, none of them are faring well.

Tommy shoves his hands in his pockets. The hell does he say? *Good luck?* Ha.

"It'll be okay," he ends up blurting out, and he has *no* idea what they were expecting, and he himself didn't even know what he expected, but it wasn't that. Tommy clears his throat, looks away. "That's—okay, that's pretty fuckin' stupid right now, but. You'll make it. And if you're sent to prison, you won't die, because none of us at U.A. will let you, and the public won't allow you to go through shit treatment, *especially* you three. Alright? You'll be fine."

Prime, why the hell'd he even come in? The only one he's close with is Izuku. Todoroki and Iida probably don't want comfort for a guy that's just been loitering around an' shit. He probably doesn't make sense, either. Maybe he should've just left them.

But when he looks back, Izuku's giving him a wobbly smile, and Iida's giving him a small, tentative one, and Todoroki's eyes look a little brighter. "Thank you," Iida says, and Tommy thinks it's because any kind of comfort from someone they know is better than none at all, and though Tommy doesn't *know* know them, at least he's familiar to them.

It's fine, he thinks to himself as he leaves, going off to find Chiyo. It'll be fine.

(He's so, so tired of being scared for others.)

Shoto is oddly calm as policemen put him, Midoriya, and Iida in a police car and start taking them somewhere. Maybe it's because he can't wait to see how pissed Endeavor is, to hear his son's being imprisoned. It kind of feels like an act of rebellion.

They're all shoved in the backseats of a single police car, but thankfully, due to some types of Quirks that take up more space, they're not crammed or climbing over each other. Well, maybe a little bit—their thighs are just shy of touching and there's a final wrap of bandages around all of their injuries, but Shoto still counts it as a win.

Midoriya glances at the cop at the driver's seat minutes after they're told their rights and the drive begins. Through the translucent wall blocking the three of them from the cop, Shoto can see that like the Hosu Chief of Police, this one's also a dog. Still looking at the cop, Midoriya mumbles, "Where do you think we're going...?"

Shoto shrugs. His father hadn't trained him on law because he thought Shoto wouldn't get arrested when he was in the higher rankings like himself, still number two despite all the property damages. Shoto was just born to—fight, he guesses, not deal with this stuff. Or, because Endeavor has some sort of team who handles this for him, he thought by the time Shoto got into controversy that could lead to arrest, there'd already be people shutting down, or something.

Iida surprises both of them when he hesitantly says, "I... don't know." He pushes a pair of temporary glasses up on his nose, the difference between it and his usual pair weirdly jarring. They took his glasses for evidence, for some absurd reason.^[2] "More than anything, I focused on training myself for heroism. If I wasn't, I was studying regular academics—math, sciences, English, and so on. If I wasn't doing those, I was—'hanging out' with friends, or with T-Tensei. ...That *is* how 'hanging out' is used, right?"

Oh. So Shoto and Yaoyorozu *aren't* the only ones who've been sheltered.

Midoriya smiles, though it's a little weak on the edges from anxiety. "Yeah," he affirms. "That's h-how it's used."

"...Apologies for not being up to date on the law," Iida says eventually. "If I—"

"Stop blaming yourself for everything, Iida," Shoto cuts in. His eyes narrow at the other, even though it tugs at his scar and gives him a dull pang. "It's. *Fine*. None of us predicted this."

Iida recoils a little, and Shoto... isn't sure if he should apologize or not, because this will forever be his stance and he won't accept any more guilt from him. But he doesn't have to do anything when Iida smiles, reluctant and fragile like all the others that he's made ever since the fight with Stain. "Alright."

Shoto nods in turn, patting himself on the back for getting through to someone. (...though, he's sure Iida isn't entirely convinced, even now. But Shoto himself is still trying to deconstruct the mindset his

father gave him, so they can work it out together.)

"...Sorry to interrupt this heartfelt moment," the cop up front begins, making the three of them sit up straight with attention, "but if you still want to know where you're going, I'm willing to answer." In the rear view mirror, the cop looks at them, a smile on their face. "Mumbling doesn't work, by the way. I have a dog-related Quirk. Better hearing, remember?"

Midoriya turns scarlet. His face is nearly the same shade as the red half of Shoto's hair. "Y-Y—Yeah, I—ssssssorry f-for, uh—I p-pr-p-*promise* I—"

The cop laughs, mixing with a bark of sorts. "Don't worry, kid," they console, tapping their paw on the wheel lightly when they're at a red light. "I know you're just worried. Most kids are, when they're taken in for the first time."

Iida pipes up. "Are you allowed to give us this information? If you aren't, then it's—it's fine if we don't know."

"I don't see why not," the cop replies. "Like I said, you're worried. And though you did break the law, you've also defeated Stain. He's evaded us for years, and him being gone is a major weight off our backs. The least I can do is tell you where we're going—though, do take it with a lot of salt, eh?"

There's another red light. Shoto nearly presses himself against the glass windows, trying to absorb every bit of the outside as he can. He's only been in places that require professionalism and demand that he keeps up a good reputation for his father—to see the area so *lively* like this is kind of... amazing.

"We are going to jail, first." The cop starts. "You'll be held there while I and others go on a little goose chase, dealing with what goes on in a public prosecutor's office. Though you've defeated Stain, you've done so in a way that would usually be given the death penalty, if you were adults, which is why we have to hand the case to prosecution instead of a child consultation center—I think. Fortunately, Japan does not give the death penalty to juveniles, but—" They pause, eyeing the three of them in the rear view mirror. "Actually, do you want to know what is still available, or will that worry you more?"

Midoriya fidgets with his fingers. "I-I'd like to know," he mumbles.

Iida nods stiffly, giving his own assent. Shoto pulls his gaze away from the window to say, "...Alright."

The cop sighs. (Maybe they should ask for their name? This seems really important, though...) "Ten to fifteen years of imprisonment," they say. "Or maybe even life imprisonment, in the worst-case scenario. That's all still on the table. If you get that but you're good, though, you can get paroled after a year, or maybe when twenty-five percent of your sentence is done."

...*Oh*.

Before they can even *process* that, the cop continues, their voice a little louder. "The prosecutor will probably turn your case into a Family Court. Thankfully, with the evolution of communication Quirks, improved technology, and how we've already conducted and finished the investigation for this case, this won't take days like it used to—just most of one.^[3] Then, the Family Court decides if the prosecutor can pursue your case. I think this is called a 'judicial waiver'?"

"Then, if this were a normal case and you could all go home, an investigator would come to you in order to... 'classify' you? As in, they'd collect things about your personality, your history, background

—things like that, to see if it has any impact on why you did a crime or offense. But this case isn't *normal*, so I bet I'll have to take you to a juvenile classification center, which is usually for more... volatile people, let's say. From there, I believe we'll go to a court hearing to work out more minor details of the case.

"Beyond that, uh..." The cop taps their paw against the wheel in a pattern, seemingly thinking. "I'm... not too sure, for these cases. I think it's a back and forth between the Family Court and a Criminal Court? The Family Court can give you probation, or send you to two types of what are basically rehabilitation centers... And then after that you might be charged like an adult." They laugh self-deprecatingly, or perhaps nervously. Maybe they want to comfort them. "I'm not sure about the specifics. But I do know that you'll be living in jail for a while, so. Sorry."

Shoto's sure that all three of them are gaping. Midoriya's quick to start beaming, exclaiming, "N-No, that's—that's so *much*! Thank you!" His smile fades easily. "...Though, n-none of that, uh, sounds, uh..."

"Good," Shoto finishes. He takes a glance at Iida, who looks absolutely stricken with guilt, and feels like they've moved back several paces in terms of progress. "None of that sounds good."

The cop sighs, beginning to pull up to what has to be where Shoto, Midoriya, and Iida will be held. "It doesn't," they concede, parking, "but... it's not the worst. Now c'mon, get up, and follow me for a little. I promise I'll try t' get the others to give you better food than what inmates are usually given until your case gets accepted."

(Somewhere in that ride, Shoto says suddenly, "Why are we going to jail again?" He pauses. "As in, repeatedly, like it's our homes.")

"Well, it's more convenient that way, I guess. If this were a single, regular case, then maybe I'd be driving back and forth between your home and the next destination. But as this is a joint case, having to travel to all three of your homes constantly would be quite tiring and time-consuming. Also, your parents aren't here—besides, well, *yours*, Todoroki. They can't house you, and most heroes are either busy with Hosu or dealing with their own interns. Actually, Gran Torino and Manual are dealing with their own sort of laws, regarding their right to have a hero license."

A pause. "Maybe you could've stayed at the classification center, but it'd be horrible and unpleasant, judging by your first reactions. I guess this is like detainment, but without the actual punishment."

"...Oh. Sorry, that question seemed obvious in hindsight."

"No need to apologize! If I can help you information-wise, feel free to ask me anything, even though I'm not an expert.")

Izuku takes a hesitant seat directly opposite of a person in a detective's suit. The room the two of them are in is quite... desolate. Empty. Dark gray walls, a single light above, a white table, two simple seats... Izuku wouldn't have been able to tell that there were windows watching in the room had he not seen them as he'd gone in. This was exactly like in the Western movies he saw a few clips of from time to time.

He'd been called for an interrogation soon after he, Todoroki, and Iida had arrived and managed to see the jail cells they'd be residing in for now. And, well, the cop did say that they'd be interrogated at some point, but this *soon*, with *Izuku* going first? It has his palms clammy with sweat.

Especially when he gets a true look at the supposed detective's face, whose stare is so empty and exhausted it reminds Izuku of Aizawa.

"H-Hello," Izuku says timidly, giving a little wave. The detective at least manages to give him a smile.

"You ready?" They ask. "Or would you like more time?"

Izuku wouldn't be here if he wasn't ready to get this over with, but the idea to stall is very attractive. So he nods anyway.

The detective sighs, setting up what Izuku can only assume is a recording device.

"Alright, then. Let's get this started."

PART 1 OF RECORDED INTERVIEW

Date: June 6, 2XXX (Tuesday)

Duration: 1 hr, 34 mins

Location: Hosu City Police Station

No. of Pages: 46

T: Detective Tsukauchi Naomasa

MI: Midoriya Izuku

T: This interview is being tape recorded and there are security cameras in the corners of the room. I am Tsukauchi Naomasa, otherwise known as True Man, and I'm based at [REDACTED]. I use he and him pronouns, and I work in the Police Force. The date is Tuesday 6th June 2XXX and according to my watch it is 12:05. This interview is being conducted at Hosu City's local police station. No one else is in the room at this time. What is your full name with pronouns?

MI: Midoriya I- Izuku sir. He and him

T: And what is your date of birth?

MI: 31.7.XX

T: Please state your cell or home phone number and legal guardian as well

MI: I- okay. My phone number- uh, cell phone is [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED], and my legal guardian should be Midoriya Inko. Her- she uses she and her pronouns- her cell phone is [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED]

T: I was about to ask for her cell number, thank you for answering it without prompt. Where do you currently reside?

MI: [REDACTED]

T: Okay, thank you. Now before we begin I need you to sign this rights waiver the contents of which I will read to you right now. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to talk to a lawyer prior to any questioning or making of any statements and have them present with you while you are being questioned. If you can't afford to hire a lawyer one will be appointed by the court to represent you before questioning if you desire one. You may stop questioning or make any statements at any time by refusing to answer further or by

requesting to consult with an attorney prior to continuing with questioning or the making of any statements

T: I just need you to sign this part right here. It says, "I have read the statement of my rights and I understand what my rights are. I'm willing to make a statement and answer questions. I do not want a lawyer at this time. I understand and know what I'm doing. No promises or threats have been made to me and no pressure or coercion of any kind have been used against me."

MI: Um I- this is my first time being in this situation and I'm not sure if I understand what I'll be going through do I still have to sign this?

T: Everything will be explained to the best of my and others' abilities don't worry. Actually would you like to have a lawyer or attorney?

MI: What's the difference between them?

T: Most people use them interchangeably but attorneys can represent you in court, lawyers cannot. It would be best if this line of questioning were continued later as once you sign the waiver you don't want a lawyer

MI: Oh ok

T: Thank you for signing. Now during this interview if you need a moment alone or something due to panic, stress, or more please let me know ok?

MI: Ok

T: Finally I'd like to let you know that my Quirk is essentially a lie detector and that I am allowed to push and ask for clarification when it comes to any lies that you may say. Is that alright?

MI: Yeah it- it is. Makes sense

T: Alright. Now when do you think your involvement in the Stain incident began?

MI: Well- is it okay if I start further before that because the beginning beginning so that things make more sense?

T: Yes that's fine

MI: Ok thank y- you. So I actually wasn't supposed to be in Hosu because my mentor- is it okay if I say his name? Oh ok it's [REDACTED]. He wanted us to go to Shizuoka for- training purposes kind of, but the train took all afternoon and w- would've taken a lot of the next day. But a Nomu had crashed into the train all of a sudden a- a- and my mentor had gotten out of the train to deal with the Nomu. I would've stayed in the train had I not seen fire rising from H- Hosu and...

MI: I don't know who a- attacked first only that my friend was in danger. That's why I attacked Stain but none of us meant to- to kill him

T: All true

MI: Yeah. We meant to hold- to hold him back or something until the Hosu Pandemonium was over and we could get help. Stain was very fast though and we couldn't run away to get help...

T: ...So Native was right. *Strings* were the cause of Todoroki burning Stain's tongue off

MI: Yes. I'm not lying and Native isn't either

T: You are not. And you are positive that there was no one else in the area?

MI: Yes. Native was holding a feather and his Quirk allows him to temporarily take some trait or traits of animals to use and he saw them. Todoroki also saw the strings

T: Alright. I believe you. So what did you say they did?

MI: I don't know but something changed when they activated. I- I couldn't see it myself but something changed ok?

T: Ok. Please calm down

MI: Sorry. I don't want a break I'd like to continue the interview. I haven't told anyone but I'm positive most wouldn't believe that Todoroki didn't mean to do it

T: Know that I do believe you. Now what happened after?

MI: Well...

PART 1 OF RECORDED INTERVIEW

Date: June 6, 2XXX (Tuesday)

Duration: 0 hrs, 58 mins

Location: Hosu City Police Station

No. of Pages: 24

T: Detective Tsukauchi Naomasa

TS: Todoroki Shoto

T: Thank you for coming.

TS: (nods)

T: Let it be known that this interview is currently being tape recorded and that there are security cameras in the corners of the room. I am Tsukauchi Naomasa, known as True Man, and I'm based at ██████████ in the Police Force. I use he and him pronouns. The date is Tuesday 6th June 2XXX and according to my watch it's 14:39. This interview is being conducted at Hosu City's local police station. No one else is in the room at this time. What is your full name with pronouns?

TS: Todoroki Shoto, he and him I think

T: Date of birth and cell phone number alongside your legal guardian's?

TS: 11.1.XX, ██████-█████-█████, ██████████, and my legal guardian is Endeavor. Endeavor's number is ██████-█████-█████ His-

T: Just the phone number. I'd like his real name please

TS: ...Todoroki Enji

T: Thank you. Where is your current residence?

TS: [REDACTED]

T: Alright. Before we begin, I need to have you sign a rights waiver, read your rights, and acknowledge a few extra details first. During this interview if you ever need a moment alone or something due to panic, stress, or more please let me know. Additionally my Quirk is a lie detector and that I am allowed to push and ask for clarification when it comes to any lies that you may say. Is that alright?

TS: Yes

T: Alright. Let me read your rights and once you sign the paper please start explaining what happened on your end of the Stain incident...

TS: Couldn't see who attacked first since I was too late but if I didn't jump in I think everyone there would've been dead

T: Ok. Was that the cause of the burns on Stain's face?

TS: No he was very fast in dodging. The burns came either later on when we were all able to attack together or at the end...

TS: I saw the strings. They tugged my ice I think. During the- (pause) Sorry

T: It's ok take your time

TS: During the switch and before my fire burned Stain I heard some of my ice evaporating like the strings were toxic. I don't know if that helps but it existed

T: Any information is helpful, thank you. So what happened after that?

TS: Stain was still breathing when he collapsed on me...

PART 1 OF RECORDED INTERVIEW

Date: June 6, 2XXX (Tuesday)

Duration: 1 hr, 56 mins

Location: Hosu City Police Station

No. of Pages: 59

T: Detective Tsukauchi Naomasa

IT: Iida Tenya

T: Ok, that's all set up- This interview is currently being tape recorded and there are security cameras in this room. I'm Tsukauchi Naomasa, also known as True Man, and I'm based at [REDACTED] in the Police Force. I use he and him pronouns. The date is Tuesday 6th June 2XXX and according to my watch it's currently 16:08. This is being conducted at Hosu City's local police station with no one else in the room at this time. What's your full name with pronouns?

IT: I'm Iida Tenya. I believe I go by he and him pronouns

T: Wonderful. Can you state your date of birth, social security, cell phone number, your legal guardian's name and their phone number?

IT: I was born on 22.8.XX and my phone number is [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED]. My legal guardians are Iida Mamoru and Iida Misaki and their phone numbers are [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED] and [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED] respectively

T: Thank you. Where is your present residence?

IT: At [REDACTED]

T: (sigh) Alright. It's not you it's just tough repeating the same things again. Regarding that before we begin I'd like to say a few things, the first being that if you ever need a break please let me know, the second being that my Quirk is essentially a lie detector and I am allowed to push on any lies you may say for clarification. Understood?

IT: Yes sir

T: Good. Now let me read your rights...

IT: I was the one who initiated the attack

T: You were?

IT: Yes I was. Native was bleeding out with Stain on top of him and Stain had seen me and offered me a chance to leave. I refused and charged at him regardless which caused most of my injuries

T: Ok. All true though that certainly is quite reckless

IT: Yes I know and I've learned from it. Regardless I was bleeding on the ground and probably would have died had Native not called out for help and Midoriya didn't hear...

IT: Yes I saw the effect the strings had on Todoroki's Quirk. Todoroki cannot change between ice and fire that fast and I can assure you that him doing what he did to Stain was not intentional at all

T: Ok thank you. Did you notice anything wrong with the strings besides that?

IT: I did not see the strings since my glasses were cracked and on the ground. I only saw the effect

T: Right thank you. What happened after that?

Sumikane Onoka sips on her energy drink, typing something away at her computer. She's just rearranging her schedule right now—everything's been in chaos since the Hosu Pandemonium. There are fewer cases coming her way considering that the police have been busy handling Hosu, and also because the Nomu have destroyed the homes and lives of many of her clients, and even some judges. An absurd yet understandable amount of cases have been moved to later in the year.

Onoka doesn't blame them for it. Family is important, above all things, and Hosu will need time to recover. There's no way everyone can suddenly piece their lives back together for a trial.

...It does leave her with much less work than usual, however.

A knock at her door makes Onoka set her drink down and look up. "...You may come in," she allows when there's no indicator of leaving footsteps.

Soon enough, the door opens. "Sumikane," her assistant, Takagama Koujin, nods respectfully, pushing the door open wider to walk in. His human eye glances at Onoka's drink and sighs. "Still drinking those? Take a *break*, man."

"Justice never stops," Onoka retorts, pushing her energy drink a little further from her and sitting straighter. When she notices the files he's holding, all sandwiched together in one neat folder, she makes a grabbing motion towards them. Takagama's robotic half's arm extends towards her without his entire body even moving from the ajar door, and Onoka pouts as she gets the folder deposited neatly to the side of her laptop. "Okay, now that's just showing off."

Takagama snickers playfully, but adopts a serious face soon enough. Usually, he'd continue this little bit of theirs for a little longer, so Onoka suspects something's different. Maybe he's in one of those funks.

But when Takagama, in a way too casual tone, inquires oh-so-innocently, "You know those three U.A. students that were hospitalized due to killing Stain?" Onoka *knows* what's going on.

"Oh," she says, staring at the files.

"Mhm."

"...Well then."

It takes little-to-no time at all to review the files, a lot less to decide that these kids are... definitely guilty, and a little more time to send the case to a Family Court that's available.

"U-Um," Izuku says, raising his voice a little over the general traffic noises, "where are w-we going now?"

He's probably the only one willing to ask. The cop that's taking them now has a sort of... tense air around them, something that makes Izuku aware of his every move—well, more so than usual. Iida isn't used to that kind of aura since his back's ramrod straight, and though Todoroki knows this as intimately as Izuku, he's learnt to deal with it by being silent. Actually, Izuku's kind of used to being on-edge all the time due to his—his past Quirklessness, so maybe he knows how to speak through his fear more than Todoroki does.

But never mind that. Izuku perks up in attention when the cop's eye in the rear view mirror locks with his. He's glad it's a red light right now, because in the middle of the car like this, Izuku can see how unique this cop's eye is; a swirl of violet shades that clash with each other constantly, not in terms of color, but like they're literally fighting to be under the person's white pupil. It's only for this eye, and their Quirk, from what Izuku knows by passing mentions, has to do something with UV light and fingerprints, and—

"Pay attention to me," the cop nearly demands, and Izuku snaps out of it by giving his head a sharp jerk. His lips feel a little numb like he's been—like he's been mumbling...

"S-S-SSorry!" Izuku stammers, cursing his damn stutter. "Um. What were you, sorry, um, what were you saying?"

The man grumbles, looking back out the road. "A juvenile classification home," they state gruffly. "Your parents can't visit, so you'll be classified there."

"O-Oh, okay," Izuku says, like those very words aren't terrifying, because when Izuku imagines a "juvenile *classification* home," he thinks that he, Todoroki, and Iida will be treated like test subjects. And though they'd already stayed in jail for a few days, getting better treatment than most inmates there did, is it bad that Izuku kinda wishes they could just stay *there* for "classification?"

He can't think of an answer since the rest of the ride is in such tight silence Izuku is kinda scared to *think* in case he mumbles. But thankfully, none of them have to deal with that for long because the juvenile classification center isn't too far away. (In hindsight, the breath of fresh air Izuku breathes quietly when he steps out the cop car is very ironic.)

Not so thankfully, they stay at the center for the other half of the week. There, half the time is spent loitering around, living there, and, and being *monitored*.^[4] At least, it's what *Izuku* thinks, and it might be what Iida and Todoroki think as well from the way they look at the cameras in the corners of every room distrustfully. They can't even talk freely with each other like they could in jail, in fear of anything they say causing some sort of *classification* plastered on them without them knowing.

The other half is spent answering questions and doing interviews with a... a "probation officer?" Of sorts?

...Is this probation? Is it detention? Izuku has no idea. All he knows is that there's a few others in this building that're a lot more dangerous than the first cop implied, and not only is Izuku *scared*, he's also becoming very, *very* paranoid.

The only plus is that they got actual clothes different from the bright orange inmate-specific ones the police had.

"Oh, wow," the first police officer from before says in a voice that's half-awe and half-pity. "You three look dead."

Tenya has a small semblance of dignity still, despite everything, so he doesn't give into the urge to smile in pure relief that this cop's back, or snort at how true their observation is. Shoto keeps a straight face, too, but there's no denying the joy in his eyes. And Izuku uncovers them all when he outright snuffles with a watery smile on his face.

("You kn-kn-know what? At this rate, let's just c-call each other by our first names. We—We defeated St-Stain together, we went to *jail* tog-together, we're at this *center* together, we might go to *trial* together—I-I-I think it's only fair?" Todoroki—well, *Shoto* now, Tenya guesses, nods to Mi—Izuku's words with surprising ease. It's only natural that Tenya does, too.)

"Everything's been tiring," Shoto says bluntly in an uncharacteristic display of openness, becoming the second to get into the police car instead of the first, but maybe he's also exhausted. The officer nods like they understand, though, so they could be seeing all of their weariness.

Starting up the car, the cop hums. With their Quirk, it sounds like a non-threatening growl. "Some of the kids I took here a few times were like this, too," they mention. Tenya, in a moment of vulnerability, lets his head lull against the black-tinted windows to his side. It's not a pillow, but it'll do. "It's normal, I think. Don't worry about it. I mean, unless you—did any of you get an interview near your release about a juvenile training school...?"

"I did not," Tenya states, because even though he's tired he is vigilant, just as Shoto and Izuku also say they didn't.

The cop breathes a sigh of relief. "If you got one of those, then that meant they'd most likely ask you to commit to a juvenile training school," they answer to their silent confusion, which. Well. That doesn't sound... nice. "I don't know what it's like there, but I just fear that they're like one of those horror schools in America—the types that have those who abuse their powers on the misguided, you know? That's one less thing you'll have to worry about.

"I do, unfortunately, have news you should probably worry about, though." Tenya mourns his short moment of rest as he forces his head up, pushing his glasses that'd gone askew back on his nose. He ends up leaning on Shoto's hot side, and, oh, that's a warmth that'll put him right to sleep, so Tenya just sits straight up. "The center informed us and the prosecution that your case does warrant a hearing. It's scheduled for tomorrow—or maybe the day after. Which is the only positive, you all do need a break no matter how small, but the next time you leave jail, you'll be going to court for the first time."

Oh.

On mindless instinct, Tenya manages, "Thank you for telling us."

The cop smiles kindly, some kind of understanding hidden in their canines. "Don't thank me. Like I said when this all started, it's the least I can do."

Chapter End Notes

samidere = tsu's younger brother[\[return to text\]](#)

idk if this is what people actually do but. for plot purposes ig ??? let it be[\[return to text\]](#)

look i'm fuckinnn hurrying things up because bnha is like years into the future, surely things have improved, but also. the timeline is Fucked aight i have No Idea what time it is for them, and i also don't want them to just be Gone for a while,[\[return to text\]](#)

very big creative liberties here. i have like no info on what actually happens here except that info is collected. everythin' i know abt the process itself is from another little graphic the japanese ministry of justice website gave me, and even that's just. vague. ish. i mean, i think they're meant to "live" there to be monitored until they have a hearing/trial or smth but. idk im flailing[\[return to text\]](#)

more creative liberties. i had no idea how the law + interviews work, so please excuse my faults,[\[return to text\]](#)

2 docs i based the interviews off'a:

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/interactive/2013/oct/16/jimmy-savile-police-interview-transcript>

<https://louisville-police.org/DocumentCenter/View/1808/PIU-20-019-Transcripts>

yes they are western. do i care atp? nnnnnnnno not really but i prolly will later

ISTG. IM NOT TRYING TO DRAG THIS OUT THE SYSTEM IS GENUINELY LIKE THIS, YALL BETTER BE GLAD I DIDNT LIST ALL THE INTERVIEWS OR SMTH IN THE JUVENILE CLASSIFICATION CENTER bECAUSE GOD DAMN THAT'S A PROCESS

i have.. a shit ton of notes since this was supposed to be one chapter,, but i decided to cut it in half since i'mmmm,,,,,, idk how long the rest of it will be and ,,,,, ughhh

(when i post my general notes on this fic once it's done, yall are gonna see how much i've suffered for you /j /lh /nm)

also ! this chapter was supposed to be called blindfold because justice is blind but now it's because all of the characters, including me, are Flailing ngl

also also ! i lied abt editing on wattpad ig—forgot that if i edit anything, comments on paragraphs will be deleted lmao (ALSO WE HIT 1500 KUDOS ON MAR 16 2023 HOLY SHITTTTAHGHAGHKAHEKG WHAT THE HELL YALL ??????? YOU'RE SO AMAZING TY *HOLDS YOU ALL GENTLY*)

um !! anyway wooo this is Fun. um. hope yall enjoyed the entire build up to the trial ahAHa,,,,, this will be my last chapter this month since i'll soon have no more time to write. even when i do, any edits yall comment about i will be making Months later because god was this exhausting and i, once again, took many creative liberties and will continue to do so for the other half of this chapter (oh godd,d,,,,)

hope you're well-fed, hydrated, and comfy, and i'll see you next chap !! :]

judgement.

Chapter Notes

prepare for a really unrealistic (ha) hearing and sentencing, and a fuck ton of creative liberties because i've never been to court and there's ?? no videos on stuff for this scenario specifically, and the documents i've found are vague imo. it's become a mix of u.s. and japan stuff smile :] (shh jsut think that because it's the future shit's changed)

only cw/tw is a panic attack on izu's part (i think); starts at "The voices leave" and ends at "Izuku can finally relearn how to breathe." didn't intend for it to be one initially but it reads like one so ,,? **this entire chapter is filled with stress, however, and the ending/results may not be satisfactory to some readers**

uhhh all 3 boys are together thoroughout this entire thing because codefendants exist and like. they were all involved in the same case/scenario and. yeah, joint trials exist and im running w the idea lmao

and if you see any plotholes n comment abt them? i will prolly fix them ,, months later, because this chapter is. really fighting me as i write rn so. (this also explains why the ending's rushed [why everything feels rushed im] sorry)

also also ,, do yall mind that this isn't like,, as tommy-centric as it should be? i mean it used to be but it's spiraled outta my control and like. idk, because there *will* be more tommy moments but,,, regardless i did remove the tommy-centric tag so 👍

ALSO ALSO ALSO !!!! NEARLY 40K HITS ????? 350 ISH PUBLIC BOOKMARKS AND 650 ISH TOTAL BOOKMARKS ????? 1649 KUDOS ?????????? WHAT THE FUCK /POS YALL THATS SO ,,,, WAAAAAAA THANK YOU SM !!!! I SEE EVERY COMMENT N PUBLIC BOOKMARK AND IM SORRY FOR NOT RESPONDING TO A LOT OF COMMENTS BUT KNOW THAT I APPRECIATE YOU SM !!!! /GEN /POS

anyway enjoy this mess on the three-digit funny hehe haha number day !!!

(p.s., want a late april fools chapter? go to the /j chapter on wattpad—it'll be deleted in a week from posting this)

SOME ENDNOTES UP HERE BECAUSE I PASSED THE CHARACTER LIMIT 😭😭😭
(trynna make it have as little spoilers as possible)

1. kotatsu= those warm table blanket things. i think the midoriyas have eaten on it^{[[return to text](#)]}
3. this is true and i am fucking up so much ,, but it's fanfic so it's half fine^{[[return to text](#)]}
4. no idea if this is true or allowed (there are several note 4s so return to text doesn't work here + im lazy)
6. bail or other options would usually be here (i think), but japan doesn't have bail so i thought it useless^{[[return to text](#)]}
8. how judges handle mental illness guide (trying my best): <https://www.neomed.edu/wp-content/uploads/5-judges-guide-to-mental-illnesses-in-the-courtroom.pdf> ^{[[return to text](#)]}

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Inko is a mother. It doesn't matter that she only has one biological child, nor that she's claimed another as her own, even if Tommy doesn't know it. It doesn't matter that she's been ignorant in the face of her son's hurt, all for the sake of keeping Izuku in the only school that'd house him without having to move out of the apartment complex that doesn't care about Quirklessness. (She doesn't even know the worst of it because Izuku hides it all, and... and she doesn't want to know. Does that make her a coward? She doesn't know. God, Inko knows *nothing* these days, but she's too tired and worried and terrified to do anything.)

Inko may be a bad mother to some, a good one to others, or perhaps one that's been thrust into the unknown and trying her best... but she is a mother.

So when she saw that one of her sons and two of his peers were being taken by police, of *course* she'd try to get over to them.

However, all transport to Hosu has been shut down for the time being. At least, until people deem it safe for passengers to be on them and all of the wreckage in Hosu has been repaired, based on what she's read. Inko likes that they've done these measures to protect the people, but if they *also* obstruct her from getting to one of her sons, can anyone blame her for her urge to just ignore it all and go there anyway?

Even now, the urge claws at her, to just get out and wing it. But, well, the things Inko is thinking to get to Izuku might get her arrested, too. Inko refreshes the online website to check the conditions of the railway paths to Hosu, sighing when it's nothing, *again*, and resists that motherly urge, *again*.

A few knocks, rapid and harsh, make Inko jolt straight up on the kotatsu^[1] in the living room. She hasn't exactly been expecting any visitors; Inko never really does anymore, besides for Tommy and the one nice lady who runs that cafe—Tari, was it? Yes, that has to be her name. (Mitsuki hasn't visited in a long, long time.)

And—and it can't be Izuku, who's visiting. But Inko hopes it is anyway.

She gets up from the couch, setting her laptop down where she sat, and moves to the door. Peeking through the little peephole it has (and only managing to do so on her toes), Inko feels a large, wobbly smile bloom on her face.

It's not Izuku, but it *is* Tommy, and an equally powerful relief slams onto her as if she saw Izuku in Tommy's place. When this all started and she's gotten over (most of) her initial hysterics, she went to find Tommy, then realized she couldn't find Tommy because she'd forgotten to give him a way of contacting her, and, and she thought she'd lose both Izuku and—

Inko snuffles quietly, pushing herself away from the door. She blinks her tears away and resists the urge to just open it and pull Tommy into a hug. He wouldn't appreciate that at all, what with how sensitive he is to touch. And she's older—*Inko's* supposed to be strong for him, not the other way around. So she collects herself, however uneasily that process is, and exhales slowly.

"Welcome, dear!" Inko exclaims as she opens the door, backing off to let him in. She smiles at him warmly, and he kindly pretends to not notice her puffy eyes or the snuffle he probably heard through the door. "Come in, come in—ah, remember, take your shoes off there."

"Right," Tommy says gruffly, untying his worn sneakers and placing them next to hers. He hesitates as he looks at his socks, but when Inko smiles at him again and moves further into her apartment, she doesn't hear him trying to take them off, only the soft click of her door being shut.

The next thing he says is, "Izuku's—I saw him. He was alright."

Inko freezes from where she'd been going to the kitchen to make him some food. "The police chief was sorry," Tommy continues. "Said they'd be charged with manslaughter. And that if they hadn't killed Stain, shit would've been different. I—I gave the three some shit that'd help with their injuries, and it worked. Mostly."

"...You *saw* him?" Inko asks desperately, her voice watery. She turns to Tommy, and it's mostly not surprising that she can feel her eyes already feeling with tears, both in relief and sorrow. She thought from how much she's cried ever since the news about her son came out, though, she could've ran out. Inko blinks her tears away, a futile endeavor. "And he's alright?"

"Last time I saw him, yeah." Tommy looks away, beginning to lower his voice to a mumble. "Sorry I can't tell you how he is currently. Fuckers took away his phone for evidence or some shit. Came back as soon as I could to tell you—I gotta, fuckin'... get the home phone number here or some shit."

"So that's where you went," she breathes, taking a step forward, but then moving that foot back. "Can I—Is it alright if I hug you?"

Reluctantly, Tommy nods. And that's all it takes for Inko to stride forward, gently take him in her arms, and start *sobbing*.

It's all she's done for the past few days, and it's never failed to make her feel raw and tired and old. "I'm s-sorry," she chokes out, but she doesn't know who she's apologizing to, and her tears keep flowing and she's supposed to be strong but one of her children is locked up and Inko doesn't know what to *do* and this has been her only solace in days. "I—" Inko hiccups. "I'm so *sorry*."

Tommy awkwardly rubs a hand on her back, body curling over hers like he's the one protecting her, and Inko is supposed to be brave because she is a mother, but maybe mothers need a shoulder to cry on, too.

(Mitsuki hasn't visited in a long, long time. The thought's looped in her head ever since Katsuki was attacked by that sludge villain—or maybe ever since she first saw the burn cream Izuku has, her son's fumbling excuses barely heard through her own thoughts. [Inko isn't replacing her with Tommy—Inko isn't replacing either of them with Tommy. She isn't. She isn't.]

It's haunted her while she forces herself to quiet her sobs at night, wondering what went wrong.)

Her tears run out, eventually (but until she knows what'll happen to her baby, her sadness feels like it never will.) Inko squeezes Tommy tight, letting herself breathe in the relief that both her children are fine. *Will* be fine.

"The trains to Hosu have shut down due to the Pandemonium," she whispers soon enough, voice cracked and hoarse. Inko looks up just in time to see the way Tommy's face screws up, and from that, she can already tell he knows what she wants. It pains her, to use his connections like this, but... "But—you saw Izuku. You *got there* somehow. Can you—?"

"I don't know," Tommy cuts off, flinching minutely. When Inko looks at him with no malice, he goes on. "I was there on fuckin'—special business, and I had Nedzu's back-up. I—you're..." He stares at her

and then shakes his head once, backing away to take out his communicator. "No, wait, the fuck am I saying? this is *law* an' shit, they're being fucking *arrested*, *surely* they'll allow you to go! You're Izuku's fuckin' mum! You *have* to be there for this shit!"

As he begins to tap furiously at the screen, Inko feels hope rising in her chest, a smile equally as fragile with it.

Inko is a mother. She's not a perfect one, possibly even a bad one, but like *hell* will she leave one of her sons alone.

"You're my attorney?"

"Yes," the person in front of him says. Though Japan disallows conjugal visits, the police had allowed this one because the visitor was Shoto's supposed lawyer.^[2] "The Todorokis have been my clients for decades."

Shoto, despite hearing Endeavor fume about any lawsuit sent to him on account of his father's "unheroic actions" several times, has never heard of this person in his *life*. Then again, with how often his father... commits legal crime and such, it'd make sense if this person was too busy handling and burying the many, *many* lawsuits and charges Endeavor's probably gotten in his "hero" career. So in a show of immense respect for being able to stand his father at all, Shoto gets up from his seat and bows.

"Thank you." He adds, because this is a *monumental* thing. Shoto pulls his chair closer to the glass wall between them. "Sorry you've had to deal with my father for so long. What's your name?"

The attorney looks like they're holding back laughter. "Shishido Yori," they reply, giving him an incline of their head that *could* be a nod of recognition. "I use he and him pronouns—I already know yours, don't worry. It's nice to meet you, Todoroki."

Shoto nods. "Will Tenya's visit like this, too?"

"Assuming he has one, yes." Shishido adjusts the lapels of his suit, sitting straighter with a more solemn expression on his face. He sets a suitcase on his lap. It might hold details of this case. "Now, I'd like to get started with business, if that's alright with you."

Tenya's parents have always been distant from him and Tensei, more so with him than his older brother. That doesn't mean that they don't love him, but Tenya just... doesn't see them often anymore.

It's not their fault, Tenya likes to think. He had to focus on his studies at Soumei and with his private tutors to have the best chance at passing U.A.'s written exams, and put even more focus on his Quirk to pass the practicals and make it to the hero course as a whole. Furthermore, Tenya's parents, although retired heroes, manage the businesses that allowed them to have expensive educational resources and several opportunities to succeed, way before Tensei even applied for U.A.

Adding all of what's happened in Tenya's year alone with the constant *need* to improve so as to not—*die*, and it makes sense. It's logical.

Yet—

"Tommy brought my mom?!" Izuku shouts, forgetting to lower his voice, but it doesn't look like he cares. In fact, he pushes himself against the bars of his cell, hands gripping them like a lifeline. Izuku stares at the officer in front of his cell with desperation. If the bars were looser, Tenya thinks Izuku would be rattling them. *"Where?!"* Is she here?! Are they—are they *both* here?! C-C-Can I—Can I see them?! Her? *Please?"*

...Tenya can't help but feel jealous, watching him.

There should be nothing to be jealous of, he thinks as Izuku's being led out of his cell. Shouldn't he be happy, for both Izuku and how Tenya's life is? Tenya's parents have done so much for him and Tensei, and they're already so busy, and every time they see him they always say they love him in some way or form. Really, Tenya's being ungrateful here—he can't ask them to come when he's worsened the Iida name to a new low. Or maybe he's given it an unwanted spotlight. He doesn't know which is worse.

Pushing away those thoughts (because Tenya's still *learning* how to handle grief and all that comes with, and just because he knows now doesn't make him an expert), he smiles when Izuku's frantic eyes flit his way. His friend relaxes marginally, though he's still practically bouncing on his feet as he, presumably, goes to meet his mom and friend. With Shoto still with his attorney and most likely talking about their situation, it leaves Tenya alone for the time being.

It's never been a good feeling, and Tenya should be used to it by now, but with making friends in a situation like this, he finds that this momentary solitude hurts worse than it ever has.

Tommy wants to brutally strangle this shitty law system for all it's fucking worth.

He must've said that out loud because Izuku's head jerks towards him and away from his mum, eyes wide in panic. (Interestingly enough, the guard watching them doesn't protest. Tommy hides a smile.)

"Don't!" Izuku exclaims, nearly getting out of his seat for some odd reason. His yelp is loud in the small room (that has a door he can easily break open, Tommy reminds himself before his hands do those fuckin' *jitters* again. He has a pickaxe—this shit'll be *easy* to break out of), and when he hears how loud he was, Izuku wilts, burying his gradually-flaming face in his hands.

"Don't do that," he says weakly.

Tommy crosses his arms. He glances at Inko, who has been crying ever since she saw Izuku. She seems to be considering Tommy's words intensely, even with the silent tear tracks still on her face. If she becomes his ally, he's totally fucking doing it. "Why not?" He scowls, staring down at his friend.

His friend, who just told them both that he was in this fuckin' *juvenile classification center* that acted *exactly* like Tommy's exile. There were just no fucking smiling faces or explosions or shitty fucking manipulating *wankers* nearby, and Izuku had friends, but does that *really* fuckin' matter? Same concept, different variables, same fucking result.

(Maybe Techno's madness had some methods in 'em, eh?)

Inko softly tugs Tommy's fingers away from where they'd been digging into the pits of his elbows. She lets go, starting with, "As... *tempting* as that is, Tommy—"

"MOM—!"

"—you'd lose everything you have right now, including the ability to see Izuku at all." Tommy would've protested a little had Inko's partially pleading stare not shut him up. Izuku, that fucker, looks up, blush receding slowly on his face, and smiles smugly—until he, too, is given one of Inko's Looks.

Tommy sighs. "Yeah, yeah, alright," he concedes gruffly, shoving his hands in his pockets. No fuckin' ruining shit or anything because everyone here is a fucking *pussy*. (...Maybe Inko's lost too much already, or maybe she's lost something so monumental no tragedy could ever compare. Prime knows Tommy has.)

"S-Speaking of that," Izuku says after a moment. "Of seeing me. You'll—" Izuku swallows. He takes a moment, fidgeting with his fingers. "If there's a, a t-tr-t-trial or something, you'll, the both of you, you'll be there. Right...?"

"Of course, Big Man!" Tommy shouts, unashamed even when the officer watching them does a shushing motion. He grins, large and reassuring—hopefully. "Why would we not?" He pauses, grin turning menacing. "...Unless the fucking *law*—"

Inko tugs his sleeve with her Quirk, a weak little pinch. Tommy takes the hint anyway. "Of course we would, Izuku," she agrees, hand reaching out to her son as if she wants to hold him. With the glass between them, Inko ends up lowering her hand and placing it further down the table. Izuku's eyes start watering again, so Tommy thinks the sentiment got through anyway.

"No more serious shit!" Tommy exclaims suddenly, clapping his hands together. He grins wickedly in his usual "I'm going to give you ten heart attacks in thirty minutes speed run" style. "You're not going back there sad an' shit! Let me regale you—oh, shut up, I know what *regale* means—anyway, let me *tell* you about the shit me and Hatsume have done..."

(Tommy has to censor some shit so that Inko doesn't get heart attacks, and she kind of nearly has some anyway, but Izuku leaves the room laughing and Inko herself is smiling, so Tommy considers it a fat W.)

Tenya gets a visit. It's not from his parents, but from an attorney they've sent for him, who only comes to talk about the case. Her name is Iwamoto Aoi, and most of the information they go over are things he already knows, a retelling of all that's happened. She probably just wants his side of the story.

The attorney pauses as she leaves. "Your parents told me to tell you they love you," she says.

Tenya nods, and leaves. He's grown, he thinks, to be able to answer Shoto's inquiring look with a simple "I just had to explain my side to her" instead of smiling and brushing it off.

"My attorney told me about something." Shoto cautiously begins some time after lunch, and Izuku already prepares himself for a life-changing *miracle*.

He leans against the bars of his cell so that he can see both Tenya and Shoto in their own respective ones. (For some semblance of normalcy or privacy, the three of them didn't want to share cells. It kind of makes Izuku feel bad since the officers had given them the nicer ones, and also isolated them from the other inmates, but... maybe he's rubbed off of Tommy too much, since he also doesn't care as much as he usually would.) "It's not going to get us out of here unaffected," he continues, "and the prosecution has to offer it, but it may lessen our sentence."

"Really?" Tenya says, eyes wide with a bit of hope in them. He glances around as if the police will overhear them—which... they probably will, but the security on them is significantly less since they'd defeated the Hero Killer for them. It's why there's no actual guard standing in front of their cells, telling them to keep quiet or something, only security cameras. Even then the officers have ignored their conversations thus far.

This favoritism is very, *very* bad, Izuku knows, but it's perfect right now, so he won't question it... until he has the power to change this system.

Shoto hesitates, which is a bad sign already. "If all goes right," he amends. "It's not an entire guarantee, but it's highly likely, especially with the... uniqueness of our situation."

"Then wh-what is it?"

"A plea bargain." The fire-ice user leans back a little, pursing his lips. "It's something the prosecutor's already offering, according to my lawyer. It's saying that if we... plead guilty, the court may take that into consideration and lessen our sentence. If we get one." He adds, "Already, the prosecution's going to charge us of murder. If we—as in, me and Izuku—aren't, then Tenya would be, at least. Your attorney told you that, right?"

When Tenya nods, Shoto goes on. "Right. And prosecutors, when they're handling murder cases, they usually charge both murder and manslaughter since it's a lesser-included offense—it's impossible to commit murder without manslaughter. We won't get charges for both, but if we all plead guilty for voluntary manslaughter—or maybe, if we all say that it was for protecting one another—we could get a lighter sentence."

...*Oh*. Well then.

Already, Izuku can picture the complications of making or agreeing to one.

There's already too much evidence that's against them, he knows, effectively making a not-guilty plea kind of useless, but. Saying guilty right off the bat? With a not-guilty plea, at least they'd have a chance, however infinitely small, of not getting charged. With being guilty right off the bat, that's a *guarantee* that this'll go on their records. At that point, even if the public would love for the three of them to become heroes, that charge would block them from doing so... he thinks.

...But if they plead not-guilty and still get charged for anything, they may get more years in prison or jail. They'll probably out on the rest of the hero education they need entirely.

(What about becoming a vigilante? A voice in his head pipes up, buried long ago, and Izuku first thinks of Tommy's good-doings, nearly agreeing. But then Izuku thinks of Stain dying on the ground and all the other unrestrained vigilantes that have turned corrupt, outweighing the good ones entirely, and swallows his bile, shoving that idea back down where it should've stayed.)

Izuku wants to help others, not have the idea of it strangle and warp him as a person—and at fifteen, even with what he's experienced in Aldera, he isn't sure if the idea of that much freedom *won't* drive him mad. The laws were in place for a reason, the Hosu Chief of Police had told them, and Izuku had thought it was to keep the peace, keep everyone safe from each other, and punish those in the wrong, but maybe they were in place to keep everyone safe from themselves, too.

And anyway, what Izuku, Tenya, and Shoto have done will mark them forever, regardless of how much they're impacted by it. Izuku... he knows he'd die for his friends, but he isn't sure about the greater good yet.)

"...Should we wait u-until after the, uh, the hearing the cop m-me-mentioned?" Izuku suggests. He looks at his two friends, who then look at each other. "It—I... With how our case is... That bargain could be a back-up plan if, uh, if it gets too bad. Y-You know what Native said—as long as our actions count as self-defense, it'll be fi—"

"I attacked Stain first," Tenya admits, looking down. Izuku freezes, because he knew that, but... He doesn't know what he's feeling at this point. "I told the detective that. He'd know I was lying if I didn't. It's on record, all written down in a transcript. That doesn't—*won't* count as self-defense, if I was the one who provoked him."

The tiny signs of near-desperation on Shoto's face are something Izuku never wants to see again. "Me and Izuku, we were protecting the two of you, so we could call it as such. And if the judge accepts that, then Tenya, you could say you were protecting Native—that isn't *self*-defense, but that has to count as some kind of defense."

"*I told him that Stain offered me a chance to leave.*" Izuku feels like he's wilting with every bitter word that comes out of Tenya's mouth. "When I told the detective that, I—I wasn't... I didn't lie for myself. I never would have." Tenya swallows heavily. Izuku's sure Shoto doesn't realize there's a frustrated scowl crawling up his face. "Even if I thought of a loophole, I wouldn't have taken it, because. Because that doesn't—that isn't *right*. I-I can't just *lie about that*, about taking the life of someone as a hero-to-be, no matter how 'bad' they were. ...Wouldn't change our illegal Quirk usage either way."

In Tenya's position, Izuku... thinks he wouldn't have lied, either. He isn't sure about Shoto, but when killing someone, even someone like Stain, it's... it has to be a heavy burden. But by *God*, does it make it harder to get Tenya out of this.

Then, Tenya sighs. All of their sighs sound like that now, tired and older and worn. It's not right. Izuku wanted to prevent it, in the USJ, yet here they are now. "Sorry," Izuku's friend says eventually, rubbing his temples with a hand. "I'm—sorry, and tired."

"Okay," Shoto concedes easily, surprisingly so. His scowl's fallen into something like a restrained frown, his eyebrows scrunched into something just *frustrated*. "Let's wait until after the hearing first, then."

"Yes, let's do that," Tenya agrees. "It'll... most likely be useless, but." He adjusts the foreign glasses on his nose. "If you have a chance, then... it'd be fine to fight for it."

"If *we* have a chance." Shoto corrects, frown deepening. He hesitates, before setting his hand—the warm one—on Tenya's back in what was meant to be a reassuring gesture, pursing his lips when the other doesn't respond. "*When* we have a chance. We can say not guilty, you know."

Izuku nods. "Yeah," he mumbles, looking into his lap. "...Yeah."

"A first appearance and juvenile hearing? Not just a preliminary hearing?"

"I, ah, got it mixed up a little—law stuff is... complicated."^[3] The nice officer—Abe, he'd finally told them, because "you'll probably be seeing more of me when we do this back-and-forth, huh"—explains sheepishly. "Um. We kind of messed up a little since you were supposed to appear in court around a day or two after your arrest, but, ah... Well. The Hosu Pandemonium, the media trying to find you three and questioning everyone... it's been quite busy. You're appearing now, so that's all that matters!"

Izuku pipes up. "So, uh. So what'll ha-happen...?"

Abe tilts his head slightly. "I think...? Yeah, I think this will be when you're informed of your charges? And whether or not you have a lawyer. If you don't then the court'll give you one. And then after *that* is a preliminary hearing. I think. But, um. That is only if you say you say you're not guilty, all three of you."

He raises a paw and makes a click surprisingly similar to a snap. "Oh! My friend let me know what that's for, by the way, the preliminary hearing. You'll have to be there if you have one because that's where the judge decides whether or not there's enough proof for there to be a case that the prosecution can actively accuse you of.

"This makes it an actual case, like we're officially stepping out of the investigation process. You could've chosen to waive it, if you'd like. Go straight to trial or something." Abe chuffs. "It's not recommended, though."

But that's... "That's kind of useless, isn't it?" Ii—Tenya says. He looks at his hand, and Shoto's own *burns*. "That hearing. There's evidence, too much of it."

Abe goes a little stiller, grips the steering wheel in his paws tighter. His claws would make dents in them, Shoto thinks randomly, eyes flicking to the leather covering the wheel. Stain's tongue tickles his palms, and Shoto remembers his own fingers digging in, just like Abe's claws, and—he jerks his head to the side, watching everything pass by the police car.

He should be over this by now. It is nothing compared to his father.

"Well," Abe starts, and then stops. "Well." He repeats, tone shifting slightly to an "I'm-going-to-sugarcoat-this" sort of tone, and irrationally, Shoto nearly bristles. But then he sighs, dog ears twitching, and ends up with, "It. Okay, I'll be honest with you like I've been this entire time: it wouldn't hurt going, as you'll get to make a lot of major decisions afterwards. At best, the case'll be called off, and you'll... get probation, or something along the lines of that.

"At worst? You'll get confirmation that this is..." The officer gestures with a hand briefly. "You know." Abe sighs again like he's grown ten years. "You'll get—*confirmation*. How old are you three again?"

"Fif-Fifteen," Izuku mumbles, hunching in on himself a little.

Tenya nods. "I am as well."

Shoto stays silent.

Abe's lungs are going to shrink if he keeps sighing that heavily. "All fifteen," he says, something disbelieving yet accustomed woven in his tone. "Fifteen. You three are strong, you know that?"

No one responds. Izuku looks away, biting his lip. Tenya's looking at his lap, thoughts clouding his face. And Shoto looks out the window, watching everything and everyone pass by as the police car softly jostles them, and shuts his mind off.

The car jerks to a stop, suddenly. Shoto focuses on reality again, thoughts murky like he just woke up. It feels like he genuinely fell asleep.

...Oh. They've arrived at the court.

Abe ushers them out unceremoniously, face pinched with nervousness. Shoto glances around, unable to find Shishido getting out of his car, or the "Iwamoto" Tenya's mentioned once or twice, or even Tommy or Izuku's mom. Maybe they're already in the court chambers, waiting.

It's when they're stepping on large white stairs leading to the entrance that the heaviness of this all finally fully hits him: this is court, and Shoto will soon be on trial just days from now.

It's embarrassing, but Shoto feels like that fact is what gets him to start spacing out. It's what he's done sometimes during his father's training sessions, trying to separate mind from body so that he can't feel anymore. He knows the essentials of what his father teaches him, but not the full details—which, for *this*, is probably important and very detrimental if he doesn't recount every detail. And Shoto tries to stay grounded, he really does, but just because he recognizes that his Quirk is his and his alone doesn't make his father any less harsher, any more softer, and he—

Izuku starts to prod him every other moment, whether it be a nudge to the side or tapping along his arm. Tenya does a few things, too, like touching his shoes with Shoto's, the tips pressing down lightly on his toes. He presses in a pattern, a one, two, three, four that Shoto can focus on solely because it's a weird feeling. Surprisingly, it helps more than he thought, even though he still feels mostly not right.

Shoto breathes to that pattern, bites the inside of his cheek lightly, pushes the side of his arm into either Izuku's or Tenya's regardless of the temperature. He keeps it going even when Tenya's forced away from him for a body search in case of weapons, even when Izuku's given the same treatment, even when it's Shoto's turn—especially when, at the end of it all, light Quirk-suppressing cuffs are enclosed around their wrists.

Izuku's started smiling ever since they were put on, but Shoto is a hundred percent sure it's fake. Izuku's smiles don't stretch his mouth like that or bare as many teeth, and his eyes actually crinkle a little in a real smile, and he honestly looks as tired as Aizawa and also like he's going to burst into tears. Tenya, on the other hand, hasn't stopped frowning. When he revs his engines, only the thinnest trail of steam gets out of his exhaust pipes. "Not these..." he mumbles to himself, and Shoto's face is blanker than usual (which is a lot by itself) when he nods in agreement.

It is quite ironic, isn't it? That the first ones going to pri—*court* are them, and not Bakugo.

There's no one in the jury stands. It's the first thing Shoto notices as they enter the court room. But there is his attorney alongside some others, and Izuku's mom there, and Tenya's attorney and whoever they've brought are over there. A judge sits on their bench, a name plaque next to it. All of these people are here... but Tenya's parents aren't. [\[7\]](#)

Weird. Shoto would've thought they would be. Because if they're heroes like—no, with similar schedules like his father, because no one can be as helpful and shitty as him, or they were as caring as Tenya, then they would be standing here. After all, Shoto's father *is* actually here, wearing casual clothing that doesn't fit his terrifying hero costume or anything about him at all. Shoto didn't think he'd care.

...No, it's not that. Shoto looks away before that man can meet his gaze. Endeavor doesn't care, never would. He just wants things to go perfectly, and so that's why he's here, watching.

Izuku hasn't stopped smiling ever since the cuffs were put on him. Shoto can focus on that. So he does, nudging Izuku like he did for Shoto. "You alright?" He whispers when Izuku's eyes flick towards him. Like this, Izuku looks terrifying—not because he's scary in any capacity, but because he looks so... broken. Devastated. There's no word to describe it. Izuku looks dangerous, but only to himself.

"No," Izuku says quietly, looking ahead again as the three of them are instructed to sit into some seats. They're all next to each other, thankfully. "I'm not. Not—" His breath hitches. He glances around wildly, hand twitching. When Izuku finishes, it's no louder than a breeze of wind like he's telling a secret to Shoto. "...not at all. A-Am—Am I... I might be. *Tired*, but y-you. You heard that, right?"

"...Heard what?"

Izuku jerks his head sharply, twisting it back to its original position like he genuinely shook something out of mind. "It's, I'll..." He takes a breath, shifts in his seat, glances at his mom. She smiles, the glistening of tears in the corners of her eyes, and Izuku's own strained smile softens. "No. Y-Yeah, no, I'll... After this, okay? I'll—I'll tell you after this."

Shoto frowns deeply, suspicion narrowing his eyes as he slowly mumbles an, "...Okay." Looking to his other side, Shoto finds Tenya staring at Izuku with a frown. They make eye contact, and Shoto raises an eyebrow as if to ask, *did you hear anything? Or, do you know what's going on?*

Tenya does the smallest shake of his head, tensing when his attorney(s) moves to his side. They're all talking among themselves quietly, using legal jargon that makes Shoto's head spin. Likewise, Shishido finds a spot next to Izuku, the only one without a lawyer, mumbling a few thing to the people he's brought—his counsel? Shoto shouldn't be trying to remember what that is, not when someone announces, "All rise."

When everyone does, Izuku nearly embarrassing himself by fumbling as he gets up, that same person (the... court usherer?) continues. "Court is now in session," they say, and Shoto's suddenly aware of the silence that blankets the area. "Please be seated."

The judge clears their throat. "Good morning," they begin. "I would like to welcome everyone who is here in the courtroom. We are gathered here for the first appearances of Messrs. Iida, Midoriya, and Todoroki here in court. Court officer, may you call this case?"

"Good morning, your Honor." Someone nearby bows slightly in Shoto's peripheral vision. "This is the murder of the Hero Killer, Stain, previously a vigilante known as Stendhal, now found with civilian name Akaguro Chizome, in the case of the prosecutor versus Iida Tenya, Midoriya Izuku, and Todoroki Shoto, case reference ICC-06/10-06/10."

He had a name? Oddly, it stuns Shoto a little, that someone like Stain was "good" before this.

The judge thanks the court officer, states that the Hero Killer will be referred to as Stain throughout this hearing, and then it begins.

Both defenses are introduced by themselves. Shishido holds himself with experience as he marks himself as Shoto's lawyer, and then does the same for everyone else he's brought. Iwamoto—yes, Tenya's sure that's her name—looks equally calm, nearly stone-faced.

These must be for the record, Tenya thinks, made to stand up and introduce himself to the judge—name, date of birth, and occupation. He hesitates for a second, feeling like he's forgetting how to speak. "I am Iida Tenya," he ends up starting with. "Born on August twenty-second, 2XXX, and a student of U.A. Hero course A specifically."

"To my understanding, you are the... younger brother of Iida Tensei, the last victim to Stain besides pro hero Native?"

Tenya clenches his teeth once, twice. "Yes, your Honor. That is correct."

The judge nods, glancing at something on their bench before looking back up. "That is all, please sit down. Now, Midoriya Izuku?"

Izuku's back could've cracked from how fast he stood up. His voice, heavily subdued, contrasts that. And he... looks very, very pale, enough to where Tenya realizes that he has a slight tan that highlights his fear-stricken face. "Yes, I'm Midoriya Izuku. My b-b-birthd—I was born on the fifteenth of July, 2XXX, and I'm al-also a student of the Hero Course Tenya is in. Ap—Apologies for the stutter, stuttering, I—" Izuku covers his mouth. Though his skin is light, the tan it's gotten shows heavily when against his pale face.

"You're forgiven," the judge says, but they're frowning. "I note that you... do not look well. Is there something wrong?"

"No! I, I mean, nothing, your Honor. Just—nervous. I-I'll get over it."

The judge purses their lips. "This hearing will not decide whether or not you are guilty, nor will it present any evidence against you or decide punishment." They state, voice clear, slow, and concise. "This is only so that the court knows at least the general details about what happened, as well as alert you of what charges you *do* have, what your rights are, and what or if anything should be done in terms of protective measures. Additionally, the court will decide whether or not there is a basis for these charges."^[8]

With every word from the judge, Izuku seems to be relaxing imperceptibly, to where Tenya only notices that his shoulders rest normally again because they've returned to a normal position. His face, still smiling, hasn't changed, but he supposes that that's the best anyone will get out of him.

"Would you like to tell me what caused your stress?"

Izuku shifts, yet it reveals nothing. "N-No, sir. If that's fine."

Seems like the judge knows they won't get anything else from Izuku, because they move on. "I have also noticed that there's no attorney standing for you currently—are you not being represented by one?"

"No, uh, no your Honor. I, um. My mom and I, we couldn't. Af-Afford one..."

And that... makes sense, doesn't it? Tenya doesn't have to turn his head to know that only Izuku's mom is here, and not his dad. "My mom and I," Izuku had said, not, "my parents."

A divorce? Maybe his dad is abroad, sending only enough money for the two of them to be alright, whether it be with genuine good intentions or neglectful ones. Because if Izuku's mom was the one working to support the two of them, she wouldn't be here at all, would she.

"Would you like one?"

Izuku nods eagerly, a sliver of joy returning to his crooked grin. "Yes, pllllll-please! I-I mean, yes, your Honor, that'd be, um, be very appreciated!"

"Mrs. Midoriya?" The judge inquires, turning to the (presumable) single mother.

She's already nodding with Izuku, gratefulness written all over her expression. "Yes, your Honor," she warbles.

"Alright. After this trial, please stay so that you and your son may get one, Mrs. Midoriya. Your son may stay with you if you'd like."^[4]

Then it's Shoto's turn to stand, near-instantly after the judge looks at him. "Todoroki Shoto," he says, tone as clipped as the defense and prosecution. "January eleventh, 2XXX. I'm in the same hero course as them." And that's it. He sits back down, just as swift and quick as his introduction.

After that, the judge goes over the purposes of this hearing: and like they've stated, it's to make sure that he, Izuku, and Shoto are aware of their charges and to inform them of their rights.^[6] Tenya notes every single right they have, along with what they're being charged with. It sears into his mind like a hot iron, changing the very structure of his brain.

They have the right to be represented by counsel, the right to remain silent, and the right to communicate with counsel, family, and friends. Tenya thinks that that's it.

They are currently being charged with homicide (well, Tenya specifically) alongside manslaughter—just as Shoto predicted—as well as breaching Quirk laws that prevent them from using their Quirks without formal authorization. Izuku and Shoto have charges as accomplices to murder instead of homicide. (Normally, Tenya would note the specific names of the laws, but he's currently trying not to shut down every time Tensei's mentioned, as well as struggling not to do anything reckless right now.)

But it doesn't really delve deeper than that, oddly enough. Really, what happens is a discussion about what he, Tenya, and Izuku had done, as well as if protective measures are necessary for them. Though the judge had stated this, it's still... weird, isn't it?

Tenya finds himself glancing around more often than not, and... this place seems softer than what he'd think courts would look like on the inside. Warmer, perhaps. More friendly, more welcoming. It makes paranoia breathe in Tenya's ear, disgusting and loud and consuming.

Was this court room really made to be calming?

"This case shall be given to the prosecution," the judge soon decides, snapping Tenya out of his thoughts, "and the defendants shall be held in jail until arraignment." Arraignment? Tenya's eyes flick towards his lawyer in confusion, but Iwamoto only holds a hand up in a "later" motion. He glances at his friends as the judge continues speaking, setting dates and clarifying facts and the like. Shoto's face looks completely emotionless, while Izuku's seemingly permanent smile's faded into a not-quite smirk that makes him look guilty.

None of them will be able to explain anything until they feel safe, it seems.

Well, this hearing sounds like it's about to end anyway. Tenya worries his bottom lip between his teeth and does what he's grown sick of: waiting.

The voices leave as soon as the cuffs are off, and a feeling of normalcy settles on him again. Izuku nearly slumps in relief, resisting the urge to just bolt out of the court room and curl up somewhere quiet and just cover his ears. Mom needs him, after all, and Izuku can't just leave her alone because he's staggering from how being Quirkless had felt after getting so used to a Quirk and because—because he's hearing things.

Is he hearing things? Those voices could've just been from the stress or something. He hasn't been home in what, two weeks at least? That could be it. He's not—Izuku's not going *insane*, is he?

No, but that voice... that was so *clear* in there. "*What's going on?*" They had cried, echoing in Izuku's head like a clear memory. OFA had, oddly enough, begun to build underneath the cuffs, energy hidden beneath the black rings, highlighting his skin a vibrant red, even though it—it should've been deactivated, Izuku *knows* what it feels like, he'd felt Quirkless for that entire trial, *he was Quirkless for that entire trial*, he knows, he knows, he knows. Izuku had started wrangling it in immediately, hands shaking, thinking *oh God no no no not in court please not now please just go back please please please—*

"*This isn't—why can't I feel my—Third, can you—?*"

"*No, I can't. What's going on?*"

He asked Shoto if he can hear them, cutting them off. Not what, not who, just in case, but Shoto hadn't, and it looked like Tenya hadn't, but Izuku *swears* he heard that feminine voice. "*Oh child, I'm so, so sorry,*" they'd said, and they'd kept talking after shutting "Third" up, said their name was "Nana" and they were a she and she was the previous holder of One for All before, before *All Might*, and Izuku's hurt and rage and fear and *sorrow* must've poured through because "Nana" stops. *Talking.*

But then, then *other voices* start talking. *Other voices start talking*, overlapping one another, seven or six of them, and Izuku is in court, he is in a hearing that decides where his life leads, and he can't—can't focus, can't think, why can't he think, why is he *panicking*, Izuku just needs to—

They stop. They all stop in the last minutes of the trial, and then their presences (because what else can he describe the white noise he didn't know was there until the cuffs were off) disappear when those Quirk-suppressors are removed with metal clippers, and now, Izuku can *finally* relearn how to breathe.

"Izuku?"

He startles, whirling around to see—his mom. "Are you coming?" She asks. "You—you don't have to, of course, but—"

Izuku's already at her side and further beyond it, asking, "Y-Yeah! Where are we going?" Because of *course* Izuku's following. Shoto and Tenya have helped him stay calmer than he would've been, of course, but if he doesn't take more breaks from all of this uncertainty and unfamiliarity with more home, then he might start hearing more voices.

Izuku's lawyer, visiting his jail cell just a day after Izuku's mom files the right papers, is a harried person. He can tell despite their perfect appearance because they have a Look in their eyes. Most likely, they need a week of sleep and then some. It's probably a miracle they haven't passed out.

"Um," Izuku says. He twiddles with his fingers, back in the same room where Tommy and his mom had first visited. "You don't, um. Don't have to, you know. Represent me. If y-y-you're too busy." This room's a lot more tinier and blander without Tommy's voice and personality filling the air, or his mom's presence capturing all of Izuku's attention.

(He doesn't like it. Maybe he understands the smallest bit of how Tommy feels about these kinds of rooms now. Or maybe not, because Izuku has a few notebook entries on Tommy specifically—he's sure Tommy doesn't fear *voices* coming back if it gets too silent or small. It's just Tommy's memories.)

The person takes their glasses off and cleans them with a small fabric patch they pull from their pocket. "No, no, it's alright," they say, smiling tiredly. Their eyes crinkle, and Izuku can see their sincerity in the corners and cracks and lines of their face. "This is normal, I'll be fine."

"Are you, are you sure? I-I don't want to—my case is kind of—"

"I know, and it's fine." Sitting straighter, Izuku's appointed attorney rakes a hand through their hair. "Once again, this is normal. Besides, you are fifteen, and it hasn't been long since your first appearance in court. I don't mean to offend you, but I doubt you know much about law, let alone have the willingness to delve into its complexities with your future on the line."

Imagining himself doing all of this alone, and then imagining his appointed lawyer doing several cases alone... Izuku winces. "Okay, that's... Yeah," he concedes. "Yeah. S-So-Sorry."

"No need to apologize, Mr. Midoriya." Izuku's lawyer replies kindly, then pauses. "Oh. I haven't introduced myself, have I?" They clear their throat lightly. "I'm Hasegawa Ryo, he and him pronouns. I'd shake your hand, but as you can see..." He waves a hand at the glass pane between them, smile turning lopsided. "That is unavailable. So, I suppose my word will have to do."

Izuku beams, feeling—not hope, because this case probably has two endings and they're both bad, the only difference being that one is just a lesser evil. It's not hope, but there's something in Izuku's chest making him feel lighter. "You too, Hasegawa sir!"

The only thing Izuku tells Shoto about what happened in court after he talks with his lawyer is that Izuku thinks the suppressor cuffs are doing something to his mind and Quirk. He doesn't elaborate—outright *refuses* to when Shoto prods more, and no one in real life or the story books he smuggled when he and his siblings were younger told Shoto that worrying about people *hurts*.

He rubs his chest a little at the thought, frowning.

The past... week or so? Shoto assumes it's been at least half a week. He hasn't... really been able to tell, because all of the days have been so monotonous with each other. All of their lawyers have been coming in and out, alerting them of what they're doing, how chaotic the outside world is about them right now, asking more questions about their stories, and more. They've even come together in their own meetings separate from their clients, figuring out the best course of action to continue before the arraignment—where they say what they plead, guilty or not.

And, well. Shishido's gotten Izuku's and Tenya's lawyers on his side, as well as Izuku and Tenya themselves, though Shoto's still unsure about it. They've entered a plea bargain with all three of their official, full consent, lecturing them for far too long about what it entails (the prosecutor recommended probation and community service for all of them,^[4] they'd said among other things, and that instead of being seen as accomplices, Shoto and Izuku would be "accessories" to murder. He isn't sure if that's better), and it's *far* too late to turn back now.

It leaves a bitter taste in Shoto's mouth, thinking about it. Because Shoto's protested against the charges since the start, and he'd probably keep protesting if he could, and yet. And yet.

"The evidence against you three is undeniable," Shishido had objected, exhausted. He rested his forehead against the heels of his hands, elbows on the table. "I've told you this, but perhaps I should go into more detail. Iida has admitted to the crime, practically, noted in transcripts and audio recordings. There are burns on Stain's body, recorded bits of ice and melted water on his clothes. His bones are shattered in ways only a vehicle should've been able to do.

"Self-defense is... specific, here. We could attempt to say that you three were protecting Native, but not only does Iida's interrogation falsify this claim for himself as he was acting in his own interests, not Native's, but you also, ah. Killed him."

Shishido clears his throat. "Article thirty-six, provision one: an act *unavoidably* performed to protect the rights of oneself or any other person against imminent and unlawful infringement is not punishable. That is followed to the very letter. The prosecution could argue that there was a high concentration of heroes at the time of the Hero Killer's attack in the area, and that perhaps Iida could've led one there, someone truly authorized. According to this, what Iida should've done best was run away—which is. Wrong, but. The law is..." He sighs. "It's something, alright."

"This also implies that the minimum amount of action should be taken to prevent the infringement of someone's rights, which is also wrong, but, well. That's out of our control, unfortunately."

Shishido tapped his finger against the table, a gavel in this court. "Article thirty-six, provision two: an act exceeding the limits of self-defense may lead to the punishment being reduced or may exculpate the offender in light of the circumstances. This means that extreme measures are allowed sometimes—but that is, ah... very dependent on the judge we are faced with. A gamble of luck, you could say. Some judges may give us the okay. Others may reason that you three did not have to kill the Hero Killer. Perhaps you could've disabled him somehow, perhaps you could've trapped him, perhaps, perhaps..."

"All hypotheticals, and yet any could be brought up. Stain's skill as a proficient murderer can be brought up to combat against that, as well as your ages and inexperience, but mentions of *experience* will lead back to how none of you brought a hero as soon as you saw what was happening."

Shoto gritted his teeth. "So we're just ignoring the two or three Nomus wreaking havoc in Hosu while this was happening?"

"We're not," Shishido had said. "But please also acknowledge that this attack occurred in a highly-populated area with several hero agencies nearby and on emergency lines twenty-four seven. Though there were few in the beginning handling Nomus, there most definitely would've been more coming later on. There were, from what you've told me, three, four, or five heroes handling one hero. From what I've done in my own time, there are enough agencies that can cover that number tenfold."

"You protesting here will not change the law. You protesting like this will not change anything at all. In fact, in the wrong circumstances, you might make things harder." Moving his other hand away from his face, Shishido's eyes lock onto Shoto's. His fingers overlapped each other, a loose-gripped clasp. "We can plead not guilty if you truly wish to do so, but this entire process will take longer, will be more difficult on our end, and you three may be given heavier sentences if we fail."

"We do not want that. This is not the Americas, nor Europe, nor Oceania. Murder is treated more—leniently, in those places." *Life imprisonment*, Abe says in Shoto's head. Twenty-five percent of their sentence served before a *chance* at parole. "...The three of us—me, Hasegawa, Iwamoto—we know you are fifteen, and you must want some semblance of normalcy at this point. Midoriya isn't handling *any* of this well. The best we can do is lessen the damage, soften the blow, make the sentence a bruise instead of a scar."

"If we were to enter a trial, one of the only articles we can use to defend you three is article thirty-seven, provision one, that essentially states that someone averting danger—which is something you, Midoriya, and possibly Iida can say about Native—is not punishable unless the person does more

damage than the danger they've averted. However, this same person will not get a heavier sentence than the offender in light of the circumstances.^[5]

"Yet please keep in mind that this is only one argument against several we have to make to counteract the prosecution. Though a plea bargain is an admittance of defeat, it is swift, less time-consuming, and does not add more pressure onto you, your friends, and U.A. as this goes on. Do you understand?"

Shoto had nodded, paralyzed under his scrutiny.

Shishido takes a breath. "Then I have to ask you this: Todoroki Shoto, do you truly want to plead not guilty in a situation like this?"

And... Shoto had shook his head no, and agreed to send a plea bargain.

Looking back on it, Shoto thinks he knows why he tried to stick with the not-guilty plea even with everything against them. Shoto is fifteen, like all these adults like to repeat as if he'll grow older, but he has been fighting Endeavor's will ever since he was four or five, and that is over a decade's worth of stubbornness and defiance woven into him. But until the Sports Festival, Shoto's only acts of protest were small things, tiny acts, too small to build up into something monumental yet big enough to have the tiniest impact—a smattering of thin rain on a raging hell-scape. Not even ten years could make that into anything special.

Yet now, Shoto's had a taste of what it means to reclaim what his father's taken from him. His power is his alone, and Izuku had proved it. Maybe it's caused him to protest more and more, see how far these limits can stretch, see when they'll break, watch for the right opportunity to get back at his father for all he's done as if the law were a person.

...Okay. That's really bad, looking back on it. Shoto is very glad that he can control his temperature, because it means that he can cool his upper half down so that there's no blush on his face. (He's positive only the back of his neck flushes red, but it's good to be safe.) He'll have to apologize after this, to Shishido.

Regardless, the plea bargain's been sent out. Shishido alerted him yesterday that Sumikane—the prosecutor, Shoto remembers—has accepted it, and it will be discussed during criminal court. Not family court anymore, but a genuine criminal court that could just sentence them to life imprisonment regardless.

And this will happen next hearing, which is... Soon. In days time, actually.

Shoto leans against a wall, cross-legged on the ground, clothes be damned. He watches his friends, currently talking in hushed whispers across their own cells, and thinks that this would be a good time to sleep. It's an entirely random thought that makes him blink in surprise, but he thinks about it a little and decides that it's right.

Court, soon. Trial. Hearing. Is there a difference when it'll change everything? Shoto might as well get some rest instead of... pondering on past mistakes, worrying about future misdemeanors, getting too lost in the present. He rests his head to the side, already drifting off, and thinks that maybe he's more affected by all of this than he thought, or even wants to be.

Izuku has never felt this restless in his life, and that's including those ten-minute moments when Bakugo used to hunt him down in Aldera.

He glances at the window at his side, the rear view mirror, Abe, Tenya, Abe again, the window again. Izuku tries to focus on the colors this time, tries to turn his mind off, think about nothing at all, but he can't. Those voices will start talking again, and being in a jail cell for a few more days after the first hearing gives him even *more* time to think than Izuku's ever wanted or needed. With it, he's thought that maybe they were in some control of OFA.

If they were the ones in control of OFA, they caused the concentration of its energy on his wrists. And if they caused that, they could break the Quirk cuffs, and if they broke the Quirk cuffs—if they're... alive, or sentient enough to just, just *do that with OFA*, then has Izuku been *housing dead people in him*? Has All Might? Has the person before him, and before that?

If so, that brings up so many questions it makes Izuku's head spin. What exactly do the Quirk suppressors *do* to make them come alive? How come they've only appeared now? If OFA is sentient, or at least controlled by the people in it, why haven't any of them helped Izuku at all? All Might has said that OFA is a *stockpiling Quirk*—if it can stockpile the, the wills or souls or presences or something of dead people oh *God*, what else has it "stockpiled?" What else *can* it "stockpile?" What *is* One for All?

"Midoriya?"

Izuku jolts, head whipping towards Abe. "Y-Ye-Y—um, yeah?"

Abe huffs. "Calm down a little if you can, okay? You're making *me* nervous, and I'm just driving you there."

Oh. "Oh," Izuku says, slumping in his seat. His back screams in relief; how long was he sitting rigidly straight? "Oh. Okay, yeah, I'll—I'll, um, d-do my best."

"I don't mean that meanly!" Abe rushes to clarify, ears jerking upright. "Just—ah... It's fine to be nervous, but maybe just... do you want me to turn the radio on? Listen to some music to distract you? I usually don't like to—it mixes in with all the sounds, and I have to be alert—but if it'll bring you some comfort, and your friends are okay with it..."

Izuku near-immediately blurts out "no don't do that I'm good" and "sorry, I shouldn't be nervous," but Shoto cuts in. "We don't mind," he assures, glancing at Tenya, who's already nodding. "It might help us, too." The look Shoto gives Izuku just *dares* him to oppose his friends, but Izuku's already folding like a wet noodle as he nods.

Admittedly, the music does help. Abe never switches to a news-station and always changes the channel if the one they're on starts delving into news. When it seems like all of them are covering U.A. and Hosu, he simply uses his own phone to play something calming. It's led to Izuku zoning out more often than not as he tries to remember the lyrics or tunes to some of the songs he recognizes, which is better than constantly thinking, he supposes.

Even Tenya and Shoto relax a little, the latter just a smidge more than the former. It's nice.

But, of course, good things never last. Izuku swallows as they approach another court building—different from the one they'd gone to for their first hearing. Doesn't make it less imposing, however, because the buildings still loom over them all when they get out of the police car, and a chill runs down Izuku's spine when he remembers the cuffs. God, he doesn't want to put them on—but Izuku's most definitely doesn't want to ask for an alternative, especially if it's worse.

Abe and one other officer stationed at the court are nearby as Izuku, Shoto, and Tenya are once again searched for any weaponry. They bring the Quirk suppressors out, and Izuku thinks to breathe, breathe, breathe as they latch themselves onto him, molding themselves to the shape of his wrists. And yet, the feeling of suddenly everything being wrong slams him in his gut and makes him weak like he's back in Aldera and nothing has changed.

At least they aren't obligated to wear the orange clothes?

He swallows, pushes through it as they step into a... much less warmer court room. The air feels cold, the colors muted, dreary, solemn. Professional. Real. Izuku feels like his mind's floating, but his twitching hands ground him.

Their lawyers are waiting at designated spots, all clearly waiting for them. There's no prosecutor, which... makes sense? They don't have to argue for their charges anymore—it's... already over.

"Sit here," Hasegawa instructs, gesturing to a spot on his side, and Izuku does obediently, the oppressing silence enhancing his lawyer's (God, Izuku can scarcely believe he has one) voice. Tenya and Shoto are further away than they'd been at their first hearing, their own lawyers sitting nearby or behind. No extra people, he notes, just Hasegawa, Shishido, and Iwamoto. There's no one in the jury stands, too—thank God, because Izuku would probably shatter under all the pressure. Still might shatter, even now.

Yet unlike its buildup, this entire ordeal is devastatingly quick.

Like the hearing, the judge greets all of the people in court. The case's name is stated (or, at least, Izuku assumes that's what the ICC-something was), and Izuku, Shoto, and Tenya are made to stand and introduce themselves again—"for the record," the judge explains, flipping through a few more pages before asking for their attorneys to introduce themselves.

There is no stalling or filler as the judge transitions from introductions to the topic of today's hearing. "Mr. Shishido, Mr. Hasegawa, Ms. Iwamoto, how are we proceeding today?"

Shishido clears his throat, projects it a little louder. "We're prepared to enter a plea, your Honor," he says, going on to state that the prosecution has recommended probation and community service.^[4]

More flipping pages fill the silence. Izuku puts a hand on his chest and tries to forget the cuffs and remember to breathe, breathe, breathe, because he's been subconsciously making his breaths shorter to make them quieter like he did before U.A.

"Mr. Iida, Mr. Midoriya, Mr. Todoroki," the judge starts. "Do you understand what has just been represented to the court? There is a plea bargain between your counsels and the prosecutor. Mr. Iida, you were initially charged with a very serious charge of homicide as well as breaking public law 211-149^[8] that disallows the usage of Quirks without proper supervision or authorization. Mr. Midoriya and Mr. Todoroki are currently charged with accomplices of murder.

"As a result of pre-trial discussions, the prosecution has moved the court to dismiss that very serious felony and has filed a new charge for you, Mr. Iida: voluntary manslaughter, a lesser homicide charge. For that, penalties for juveniles are punishable by up to one year in prison and up to a three-hundred dollar fine before possibly being placed on probation. For breaking public law 211-149, that adds a possible additional month of jail time and a half a year of community service.

"For Mr. Todoroki and Mr. Midoriya, as a result of pre-trial discussions, the prosecution has also told the court to dismiss the accomplice charges in favor of charging for accessories to murder. Breaking

public law 211-149 has already given you a maximum of a month of jail time and half a year of community service, which will be added to the limit of half a year in prison due to the accessories of murder charges." The judge looks up. "Is this your understanding of what is happening here today?"

Izuku swallows and prays it isn't audible. Yes, Hasegawa and Iwamoto and Shishido had told them the punishments, but hearing it said by a real judge is... "Yes, your Honor," he affirms anyway, with Tenya and Shoto following close behind.

"There is also a recommendation that the case be referred to first offenders. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, your Honor."

The judge keeps asking them if they truly understand what's happening, if they truly know that the prosecutor has only given them recommendations, that they understand they are giving up all rights to a fair trial, to confront witnesses, to—to do so many things if they hadn't thought this a lost cause.

Shoto looks angrier the more questions they have to respond to—Izuku's gotten a good enough read on him over these weeks to know that it's with a pinch of nervousness, with a slight petulance tugging at his lips. It's enough to know that he's raring to get a chance.

Tenya looks resigned. He always looks resigned now—all three of them do, and all three of them look tired, and Izuku's already noticed this a thousand times but it'll never stop hurting. (Sometimes, in these past few weeks, Izuku thinks that these are the wounds Stain's given to him and Shoto: a never-ending sense of failure, infected at the sides and bleeding hope.)

Izuku does not want to know what he looks like.

They keep answering questions, things like if they're being bribed or threatened to make this plea, if they're on drugs or alcohol, and then if they're Japanese citizens, if they're satisfied with their lawyers... on and on and on.

"Mr. Iida, how do you plead to the amended charges of voluntary manslaughter and breaking public law 211-149?"

"Guilty," Tenya says, only slightly hesitant.

"Mr. Todoroki and Mr. Midoriya, how do you plead to the amended charge of accessories to murder and breaking law 211-149?"

"G-Guilty." Izuku answers, nearly in sync with Shoto's more collected version.

The judge looks at them all. "Would any of you like to tell me what happened?" *It's for the record*, Izuku thinks. *For the record*.

In a scarily neutral tone, Tenya starts first, detailing his encounter with Stain before the Hosu Pandemonium. Izuku cuts in when his friend gets to where he almost died, pausing to shoot a worried look at Tenya, who's gotten that look that he and Tommy saw just before the internships, before continuing. Shoto jumps in too, in some moments, filling in parts that Izuku hadn't seen. They all try to shorten it into under five minutes, but it's hard with the way Izuku keeps stuttering too much, or the way Shoto sometimes falls silent mid-sentence, or how Tenya can't speak for the rest of the summary.

The judge asks for the attorneys versions and opinions, and they answer. Iwamoto is curt and does not reveal her true feelings on the matter. Shishido expresses that they're doing what most others would

do in their positions, as soon-to-be heroes. Hasegawa, though sympathetic, is surprisingly neutral. None of them say that they don't expect their clients to do something like this again.

"Thank you," the judge finally finishes. "The court finds the plea to be voluntary, understood, and accurately given, and accepts the plea, the voluntary manslaughter for Mr. Iida, the accessories to murder for Mr. Todoroki and Mr. Midoriya, and breaking law 211-149 for all three." The judge's stare pins Izuku to where Izuku stands, flicking to Shoto, then Tenya. "Todoroki Shoto and Midoriya Izuku will be given jail time for one week, and given three months of community service."

And then, the judge decrees: "Iida Tenya will be sent to prison for one month, and when released, will be given one year of probation and a subsequent half a year of community service."

Izuku clutches the hem of his shirt tightly, barely hearing the judge dismiss the court.

There's no going back now.

Chapter End Notes

2. "why couldn't the boys have stayed in the juvenile classification center?" you may ask. i... have no answer. i think while writing i just Didn't Consider That, or maybe i read that it was for protective measures and thought "well if they determine the boys aren't dangerous why stay there," maybe i'll edit it (i prolly wont lmao)[\[return to text\]](#)

and look, maybe they do the preliminary hearing before introducing a plea bargain, but i'm Not rewriting anything man

5. all based on this: <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/hourei/data/PC.pdf>. me and my friend could just be interpreting this all wrong (more on me imo). also sorry for the word/info dump, law is long and hard[\[return to text\]](#)

7. so this is a juvenile hearing which is done in a warm atmosphere. no public prosecutors or anyone else besides victims and family allowed (<https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-droit-penal-2004-1-page-409.htm> part III). idk if attorneys are allowed, but i'd say yeah they are. sumikane would only be there if there needs to be more facts found out, but tsukauchi's got it handled[\[return to text\]](#)

8. based on u.s. law a little? public laws are (according to https://www.govinfo.gov/help/plaw#:~:text=Public%20laws%20citations%20include%20the,L.)) named like "Pub. L (congress #) (law #)" but i changed it to line up w the national diet (japanese congress??) and as of 4/20/23 (HAHA), the national diet's on it's 211th session (<https://www.sangiin.go.jp/eng/>) so ?? yeah[\[return to text\]](#)

also using uhh this video for this scene: https://youtu.be/lxpmTqz_EIk as well as the trials having to do w/ ethan crumbley. both of them are tragic :[

okay so in japan, there's smth called saiban-in. it's like for really serious cases (murder, rape, etc.), but a doc states: "[...] for juveniles [less than 20 years of age], education and rehabilitation are preferable to criminal punishment. While regular criminal cases are tried in District Courts and Summary Courts, juvenile cases are primarily dealt with in Family Courts."

so if you know abt saiban-in and are wondering why i didn't use it, or why the punishments are kinda lesser ig,,,,, ,tadah *jazz hands*

also !! here's the main process or the main path i chose: police > public prosecution office > family court > juvenile classification center > hearing > referral to public prosecutor. from: [here!](#)
(tryna save character space)

one source said that b/c 14 is over the age of responsibility, the case has to be given to a child consultation center so that it's approved to be handled by a family court, but another contradicts that w the police just going to the public prosecution's office, so i just chose one path

also, we don't hit the conclusion in this chart because since the boys did smth that would be a criminal offense, the family court can refer the case back to prosecution after the protective measures (classification center) i think, and that's what leads to the criminal court taking over. think of the family court making sure the juvenile offender(s) are okay before they get genuinely charged, i guess.

[doc w saiban-in info \(i think\) plus more! \(go to the last 2 pages\)](#)
[another doc i used for info on the process](#)
[also another document used \(go ~pg 33 section d. juvenile cases\)](#)
[i used a few court transcripts for sssome of the trial stuff from this website](#)

um !! anyway woوو that was Fun. hope yall enjoyed this ,,,, (do yall mind that this is less tommy centric? 'n' that this seems like it focuses on mha part instead of tommy and like,,, idk ,,,, sorry) idk how i'll get back to regular plot stuff my god ,,,

sorry this chapter was so underwhelming!! more bad news: prolly won't be a chapter next month, sorry ,,

hope you're hydrated and well-fed and comfy and not spending your time unwisely like me, and i'lllll see! you! later !!! :]

lost.

Chapter Notes

added a cw for last chapter for like. the general stress 'n' sort of bad ending. didnt add it originally cause i thought people would be used to all the angst/stress by now + it isnt exactly traumatic (i think?) but someone (not sure if they wanna not be anon but jsut in cast) wanted it so yeah !! its there now! sorry for not putting it there

also been kinda on the fence considering ao3's decision abt allowing AI on it but,,,, i decided to keep my stuff open after like privating everything for like 2 seconds lmao; i kinda want readers to see my writing even when they don't have an acc yk? sucks that AI's prolly already scraped stuff from this fic and shoved it into an agglomeration but. for the anon readers !!!!!

ANYWAY! **this chapter's cw/tw:** accidental self-harm + a breakdown and panic attack (not over the self-harm). the self-harm is kinda brushed over i think? [no explicit desc's, just a referenced moment and pondering the aftermath] the self-harm's after "What if, what if, what if —" and it ends when Tommy mentions his sixth diamond pickaxe

breakdown starts when tommy starts sobbing (it's a one line thing you'll see it) and ends when aizawa does the 5 4 3 2 1 grounding thing w him. it's also vvvvv *dialogue heavy* after that so (tried my best to make it less but yeah!!)

anyway enjoy smile :]]

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Usually, exams of any kind being pushed back would make Tooru vibrate in glee, but for this year? The written exams being postponed for Class 1-A is... honestly kind of a bummer.^[1]

Don't get her wrong, it makes sense. Everyone, including her, is so... terrified of what happened, after the internships. Tsu looks like she hasn't been able to sleep at all, and though Bakugo's new hair was hilarious the first time, Tooru wants to believe that that's what made him so subdued and quiet instead of the news, and that when it's fixed, he'll come back to his usual sparky self.

All the monumental growths they've achieved during their achievements—Koda triumphing over his fear of bugs, Jirou being able to break large debris with her ear-jacks, and Sato's sudden aptitude in defense, to name a few—don't feel appropriate to celebrate, too, not when three of their classmates are imprisoned. Until this week is over, they'll all be reminded of their three empty seats—and even when it passes, even when Todoroki and Midoriya come back, nothing will feel right until Iida's back, too.

It's not even *fair*, either! All three of them could be dead, or *would* be dead if they hadn't used their Quirks! Yes, killing Stain was too much, and Tooru can't justify that, but they were also defending themselves, weren't they? If they had to kill Stain, then that—that probably means there was no other option. If they didn't do that, Tooru's class would probably be *mourning* instead of stressed out of their minds!

...None of this can fully cover the fact that the same villains from the USJ were tracking the one area that Stain was in, the one area that Iida was, the one area that Midoriya and Todoroki were close to. Tooru can't help but wonder if they knew where everyone else would've gone for internships like they did for the USJ, like they stole some sort of universal tracking device or something.

It might be pretty far-fetched, seeing as U.A. hasn't had another security breach (as far as everyone knows), but then again, everything that's happened in this one year is also "far-fetched."

Tooru grumps quietly to herself, clenching the pencil she was twirling in her fingers tightly. She releases it before she cracks the wood or something, setting it down lightly on her desk and turning to the window to try and distract herself. Unfortunately, she's tried this many times already, and there's nothing interesting to look at in the same blue sky with few clouds after nearly a year unless it rains.

(Tommy would've done something with them, she thinks. Maybe he'd have played some sort of game with, told them to spar or train, given them custom gear, or got them some English snacks from somewhere niche that he'd found. Maybe he'd take the class to pet some animals, too, at the animal habitats, or find their own Clementines in these trying times.

He's been gone for a few days. He'd also been quite unstable before that, all the way until the results for the Stain case were announced. Tooru wonders if he broke.)

She, Kirishima, Ochaco, and Mina have sort of banded together to try and lift everyone's spirits ("We're the Hype Squad!" Mina had enthusiastically proclaimed), and it's working somewhat. The little trinkets they buy on occasion and leave on everyone's desks do some good, and it makes the four of them happy in turn when those same trinkets end up hanging on something, like clothes and key-chain rings. They're finding less crumpled-up notes, too, and more of the short, happy messages left inside being kept. It's a work in progress on what else they should do, but it's *working*.

...Still. For things like this, she *wants* exams to be close, wants to think about all the formulas and letters and things she has to memorize instead of how *off* class feels.

At least the practicals are still gonna happen. Though with an odd amount of students, Tooru wonders what'll happen.

Tooru turns back to the lesson in front of her, leaning her face on her fist as Present Mic tries to lift peoples' spirits in English, and silently sighs, waiting for everything to be over.

Tommy has been mining here for three days, ten hours, and twenty-four minutes—he knows he has, he's checked his communicator in case the news of the case changed no less than fifty times—and Tommy does not feel any calmer than when he first impulsively packed his shit up and put it in his little mineshaft.

How could he be? *Nothing* is alright—news of the end result of the case came out. *Jail time for a week* loops in his head, quieter than the *prison for one month* and *one year of probation*. And, and he can't go back—Tommy does not want to go back to U.A. because if he does, he will think of the newscaster's voice in his head saying his students' punishments live for everyone to hear, and the class will not feel right without Iida or Todoroki or Izuku.

Tommy might lose it earlier, in there. And though things are shit right now, he still wants to protect the rest of his students from all the nasty bits he has in him; from all the mold and disease from exile that's rotted all his emotional control.

(It feels like *he's* the one who caused this shit, or at least it's half him and half this dumb-fuck place's fucking faulty judgement system. It doesn't make sense, Tommy knows, but Tommy's also a major reason why Izuku has more confidence in himself, why Iida could've had more confidence to enter the fight [because if Stain hurt him, well. Tommy gave him those god apples], *and* why Todoroki could've used his fire more [from Tommy to Izuku to him].

He's thought of what-ifs no less than a thousand times as he mines. What if Tommy did a little less? What if Tommy had cautioned them to be more weary, or placed more emphasis on leaving if shit was getting bad? Tommy would never do those things, finds that he can't ever regret the influence he's had now, but it's like, like exile. What if, what if, *what if*—

What if they'd gone in and died instead? Something still pained and recuperating in Tommy's brain had cut in last time, and he slammed his pickaxe down so suddenly with such shit aim he had to use part of a golden apple slice to regenerate his finger.)

His hand twitches at the reminder. Tommy looks down at it again, at the one finger that doesn't have any calluses on it. It feels weird, feeling a soft fingertip instead of a rock-solid clump of dead skin curving over it. The old finger he's already thrown into lava. The new part twitches again, and Tommy makes himself raise his sixth diamond pickaxe up again, hammering it down into stone.

Like all the other strikes, it chips down the rock, resonating down the lone tunnel he's in that's only lit by torches every so often. (They're spaced out; Tommy doesn't know if it's intentional, if his mind's subconsciously "punishing" himself like this, closing in the walls with darkness and stone, letting his hits echo to remind him how he used to do this when he was in—)

Tommy's sneaker hits something. He pauses, zones back into reality to find the tip of his shoe against the underside of his pickaxe. The tool's dug into the ground instead of in front, and if he pulls a little, he might upend the stone. Tommy huffs—first his finger, now nearly his shoe—and picks up his tool to keep moving forward.

...He doesn't *need* to do any of this now. He's found several stacks of diamonds since he's grinding so much, as well as exponential amounts of iron—don't even get him *started* on the shit tons of coal. Hatsume doesn't need anything right now with all the iron she has now, even more so when Tommy's started finding other metals for her and her—babies? Children? Her shit.

(And yet none of that was enough to protect anyone. So why is he still here?)

He could place a torch here, he thinks. Make a dent in a wall, light a stick on fire, light it here. It won't take too long. The last one's far enough that his pickaxe doesn't have a glint to it anymore. But Tommy just—keeps going. And he doesn't know why he keeps going, or maybe he does and he's just a dense bitch, but Tommy keeps going ahead, more and more, and—

—*Footsteps*, subtle ones, only heard because Tommy has been here for three days, ten hours, and twenty-four minutes and he knows can get used to monotonous, judging silence in less. Tommy whirls around, slams a couple cobble blocks down. It encases him in near-darkness, only broken by the faintest fucking light from the torch oh-so-far away through the smallest fucking cracks of the broken stone, and immediately, Tommy feels too seen and so very small and like bugs are crawling all over his damn skin.

Fuck, he didn't think this through at all, but Tommy is a man who stands with all his actions, so he just, he's just *gotta suck it up like usual*, he mouths to himself, reaches under his sleeves and tugs on his worn bandages, and prays, and prays, and prays. (—for what? *Why*? Prime hasn't helped with *shit* here.)

Tommy could place a torch here, act like he's suddenly placed a beacon and gotten haste and speed up his pace. And he does—that is, speed up his pace and put more distance between him and his little blockade, just two more layers. He doesn't place a torch (cobble has cracks, and light is a very dangerous thing, even with the blockade), instead backing up and staring at his blockade and waiting.

"...Christ," the enemy breathes, muffled through the cobble and distance. Reluctantly, Tommy leans forward a little, pushing himself against the cobble just the slightest to hear better. The footsteps get closer, but they've slowed, "How far did he...?"

Wait. Wait, wait, wait—

Tommy breaks the top blocks of the impromptu barricade off and nearly gets fucking jump-scared by his—friend...? Fellow co-worker, at least. He was far closer than Tommy thought. Though, said co-worker is clearly startled from the way he flinches back, and for someone as bored-looking and practically unmoving as *Aizawa Shouta*, that's a damn feat, in Tommy's highly-regarded opinion.

Aizawa looks so tired. No, that sounds repetitive, at this point—Aizawa looks like he hasn't slept in a month and has been living on the streets for longer, cheeks slightly gaunt in a way that implies that he also hasn't eaten as much as he should, unlike his usual "I-haven't-slept-in-a-week-but-at-least-I-have-shelter" vibe. He's wearing his underground hero clothes, but they hang over him more than usual.

Yamada and Nedzu might be the only people that're able to and have been forcing the man to eat; the seemingly-permanent glare Aizawa's face now houses would be very intimidating for everyone else, Tommy thinks. The only tell that it softens at all is when Aizawa sees Tommy and a flicker of relief passes through his eyes.

"Tommy," the pro hero says like a lost man who finally found something familiar. It cuts through Tommy's—everything, just a little. Like he can't believe it, Aizawa repeats, "Tommy."

"You look like shit," Tommy says honestly. Aizawa actually fucking *chuckles* or some shit with a painful facsimile of his shit-eating grin; whatever's going on above is making him lose it.

Of course, the man is logical and practical in every way possible. It's never been good for Tommy, specifically when Aizawa continues with, "You didn't answer any calls or messages."

Not "any *of my* calls or messages," but "*any* calls or messages." Tommy winces.

"...Shut that shit off early on," he admits, only half ashamed. His fingers adjust their grip on his pickaxe before he decides to hook it on his belt. "Sorry."

Aizawa says nothing, just keeps staring. Tommy fidgets a little. He breaks two of the lower cobble blocks but leaves one to lean against as he moves forward, Aizawa meeting that same block in just a few steps. It's like his only barrier against whatever the hell Aizawa might drop on him, or whatever's outside.

(Some bitter, naive, still-outgoing part of him sneers that he's become a *coward*. Where did all his bravery and courage go? Where did that little warrior for L'Manburg go? Where is, out of the few people who stood against Dream, the leader of that whole shebang?

But the majority of him is starting to break—has been, ever since the USJ, he thinks. Dream and the wars may have shaped him into netherite, but even that can break, too, after a while. *Especially* like this, where the people he's went and gotten attached to are *and still can be* taken because of shit like the Stain event.

It's like Tommy's becoming a broken tool—he'll gladly use himself to keep his friends and family safe, but eventually, one day, today, maybe, he's going to splinter and shatter and become barely usable, even when he picks up the shards and still tries to use them.

...so—and Tommy is selfish, so *selfish*, he's *begging* anyone at this point—if he can't have his friends or loved ones, *please* just let him fucking have this. Please, please just give him a chance, just a little longer, to get the strength to mend himself for his cause, his cause that he will break for, will *care* for, even if it hurts, even if he becomes a coward, even if he has to hide away for a while to restart without dying.

That can't be cowardice, right? If he's just, just becoming dormant for a little and regaining strength to fight again—that *can't* be cowardice.)

Aizawa purses his lips slowly. "Were you intending to be found?" He asks, his voice so carefully neutral.

Tommy looks away, curls a hand around his upper arm. "I—I don't know," he replies honestly. Because he doesn't; he truly, genuinely does not know, doesn't even have a *figment* of reasoning to begin explaining what the hell he's been doing.

As if it'll be a good replacement for an answer, Tommy says, "I shut my communicator off." Then, nearly an afterthought, he adds, "Sam's tech auto-removes trackers, I think. I don't think you'd have been able to find me with your tech anyway." The silence lingers. Tommy starts panicking just a little, because all of this looks very, *very* bad when he thinks about it more. "I wasn't—*abandoning* you. Or U.A. I was just. I needed to—"

Aizawa laughs. It sounds cruel. "At least tell someone before you cause more problems for us."

Oh. Tommy doesn't realize he's flinched until after his hand's settled on his hip, reaching for his pickaxe.

It helps a little that Aizawa immediately looks apologetic, running a hand through his hair. It snags on something before his fingers barely even get through it; Aizawa seems to force it through, gritting his teeth in pain until his hand slips out mid-way through. "Sorry," he grunts, then sighs. He plays with a few of the strands of hair he must've pulled out. "Sorry. I mean it. There's just—so much going on, and... do you even want to know?"

No. Maybe. Yes. No. "What's going on with our class?" Tommy settles on.

"They're panicking and more despondent than usual, which is inevitable. We've gotten several calls from parents to take their children out of our class, even for non-hero courses. The only reason a majority of them are staying is because these recent events have caused classes to stay closer than before, and the students don't want to lose their friends when all seems unknown."

Most times, Aizawa's cut-through-the-bullshit attitude is amazing, but Tommy feels it rend him through the longer he talks. Aizawa looks passive throughout all of this, though Tommy just knows that man is probably taking pleasure in how much Tommy's fucked up. Who wouldn't?

"I've attempted to get them sent home longer," Aizawa voices. "So has Nedzu. Higher-ups aren't having it, though—there's a few rumors going around that they're considering shutting U.A. down entirely for endangering its students, as illogical as that is. As in, they'll do *that*, but not let the students go home beforehand..." He runs a hand through his hair again, pausing at a knot and deciding to try and pick it apart. His gaze is a little out of it, staring at something beyond Tommy.

He hadn't said those rumors weren't true.

"We've been arguing that none of these events were in U.A.'s control, and that, unfortunately, worse things have happened." Aizawa doesn't hide his wince in time. Or maybe he's too tired to even consider doing so. "Press has been bombarding heroics students whenever, and non-heroics only a little less.

"One station got a whiff of Mina Ashido's address, tried to trespass; the newscaster and their station are currently facing the law and are also unable to tell the address to anyone, lest they trigger the Quirk set on them. Anyone who knows her address from them has been set under that same Quirk. Everyone is now being sent home by bus or car, and they've been given something to alert heroes or police if they think someone is following them, as well as extra patrols near their homes."

Tommy twitches. Aizawa blinks, snapping himself out of his possible daze. "I hope this is a given," he starts concluding, "but Class 1-A does miss you. So does the mechanic—Hastume Mei. Shinsou Hitoshi's come up a few times, more frequently as time goes on; says he doesn't blame you. Our class just want to be sure you're okay."

Tommy grimaces, huffing before he knows it. "Really?" He says with no small amount of doubt. "Even when I did all of—" He makes a hand wave to the corridor they're in. "—this?"

"Yes."

"And what about the staff? Surely Nedzu or that old man—uh, Toshinori—wants me gone."

"Yes, even them. Especially Nedzu." The surprise on Tommy's face is surely showing, because Aizawa's face cracks into the smallest sliver of a smile. Unfortunately, it fades, matching the gradual exasperation that's been building in his tone. "You up and disappeared right after your best friend and two of his friends are taken into jail and prison, and you know that Nedzu is far more observant than the average person. From your end as a vigilante to now, that hasn't wavered.^[2] Whatever it is you've told him recently has him more worried, really."

Ah. "Sorry," Tommy says, guilt pinning him where he stands, because is there anything else he can say to that? "I just. Sorry."

Aizawa stares at him a little longer, then sighs. "It's fine," the man says gruffly, which. Surely, *surely* it's not *that easy*, right? Like—by shutting off all means of communication, Tommy's made them all think that he was leaving them despite all the shit going on, and—okay, being in the mineshaft isn't *exactly* staying with them either, but Tommy was going to go back, and—and he was going to help as much as he could, and...

"It's fine so long as you're actually *recovering* here," Aizawa amends, and Tommy jolts from his thoughts, looking at the underground hero again. An underground hero that is currently assessing him with crossed arms, frowning. Tommy feels a little barren and raw, just standing under his gaze. "The fact that you kept going with no light is *not* good. Have you even come out at all? There have been lone chests, crafting tables, and furnaces in your tunnels, yet none of them had any food or water around or near them. I saw a *splatter of blood* back there. Besides mining for however long you've been here, what have you *actually* been doing?"

Prime, what an awful hypocrite. Yet, Tommy can't bring himself to do anything more but stare at him blankly.

Aizawa sighs, pinching his nose. "Recovering and running are two different things—even I know that. And I think you need the students as much as they need you," he says, and something in Tommy's chest fucking—*spasms*, or something. "Do not misunderstand: you are still forgiven. Yet if you can't keep yourself from falling apart here, then at least let others try to help. If that involves something ugly like throwing things around and screaming, I'm sure people won't mind. In fact, U.A. has rage rooms specifically for that: breaking things, or relieving anger and general overwhelming emotions. So long as Nedzu is in charge, people won't—"

Tommy starts sobbing.

He doesn't scream or wail like he's used to. Tommy just—leans his elbows on the cobble block, buries his face in his hands, and starts shaking as he silently cries.

It's just something about the heavy amounts of dust particles in his eye from mining for so long without much of a break. Maybe they've weighed down his eyepatch, too; why else would his weird eye be tearing up as well? But Tommy can't entirely blame the dust for his shaking since it's only irritating (and oddly grounding, sometimes), so he—he will admit, hesitantly, that it's also something with this *entire fucking conversation*.

Tommy must've numbed himself somewhere in these past few days, because until now, he'd felt totally fucking fine during this talk. Sort of detached, really—but that's not the point! The point is, Tommy felt perfectly fine until now, until Aizawa-*fucking*-Shouta suddenly busts out this fucking—this *psychoanalysis skill* that Puffy also has, while also *forgiving Tommy for running away*, and before that, revealing that *people don't want to kill him and still care* (highlighted, bolded, *and* underlined in Tommy's head), and it's, it's just—

Fuck, not to mention that Aizawa's right, he *does* have to get his shit together and hasn't, but, but it's just, Tommy can't—

"*I can't keep my shit together because they all keep fucking DYING,*" Tommy wants to scream, but it ends up coming out all muddled between his gasps and hiccups that show his pathetic attempt in speaking. He sounds like he's fourteen again when puberty was slamming into him like a truck with how his voice goes in all different pitches. "They—they're not dead, of course they aren't dead, you just confirmed that, and Todoroki and Izuku aren't even in—fucking—jail for that *long*, but I-I just, I—everyone I care for keeps getting close to death, even here, and I can handle it, I swear to fucking *Prime* I can, I usually can, but, it's just, I-I *can't*—"

"They keep nearly dying and I keep caring and you can say that that's good but it's not when they're at the center of everything and I don't have the power **tO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT!**" This is so fucking *pathetic*. Tommy claws at the front of his shirt, still covering his visible eye, as he tries to find something to anchor himself on. "And there were oth-other people like this, you know, other people close to me, but they also kept dying, but where I was I actually had some fucking *power* over how shit could go, and I tried my best to help them, and, a-and it was just never enough, and it's happening again here, and I can't fucking handle this anymore because it's been attack after attack and barely any time to breathe, and—"

Tommy feels like he's going to heave his lungs out with how painful his wheeze sounds. He hates this, *hates* feeling like this, wants to go back into numb apathy, but his stupidly huge mouth just wants to rat off everything that runs in his head today! "Maybe that's why I ran, so that no one else but me is hurt because maybe if I go they'll target me instead, because these things usually happen to *me* only. But that was a shit move, wasn't it? Just abandoned you all, left you to suffer alone, and I-I didn't even *realize* that, I was just so absorbed in myself, I'm, I, I left you all vulnerable but you still care and fuck I'm so *sorry*—"

"Tommy," Aizawa tries to cut in, and it works only somewhat. Panic still blazes in Tommy's mind when the man attempts to reach forward, his hand coming up to rest on cobble. "I just said that you were forgiven, right? Look—okay, tell me five things you can—"

Tommy's mind consumes itself in anxiety, the only thing he can hear becoming the rush of blood in his ears as his heart thumps and thumps and thumps. It has him stumbling back until he hits solid stone, eye glancing around wildly as the shadows close in more. He curls in on himself, hands over his ears and head, something digging under his arm painfully and screeching against the ground, trying to breathe, trying to breathe.

Tommy isn't sure if Dream was the cause of his revival here upon death. Maybe not, if Dream isn't the Admin here. But that doesn't change the fact that that man has never stopped fucking haunting him, does it.

So if Dream wanted to revive him in somewhere painful, he sure got what he fucking wanted.

Because Tommy will never stop caring, it feels like. And the people around him that he gives this care to will never stop dying or getting close to it, or getting into shit that leads to things similar to death and imprisonment that makes Tommy's entire being want to shrivel up and die. Tommy will bleed, and bleed, and bleed, and because this land is rotten and unjust and unknown, it will run him dry and ask for more, tricking him with its flowers and vivid colors.

(And the sad thing is that if Tommy were back in Pandora's Vault with the knowledge that this would all happen again, he finds that he wouldn't be entirely opposed to not changing anything, to get back here, to care for the same people and go through the same traumas. The only reason he'd refuse would be for—for Tubbo and Ranboo.

If they weren't just as precious to him as Class 1-A and everyone associated with it has become, Tommy would come back here.)

What the fuck did Tommy even do to deserve this shit? What did Dream see in him that fucking—that infuriated him so much, the entire world's decided to follow him and start shitting on Tommy too?

Tommy has *never* fucking liked change. Maybe he should've fucked off to an abandoned place, made a home there, and just lived his damn life out *alone*.

Literally everything in him hurts at that thought, though. Because then, Tommy wouldn't have met Izuku or Tari or everyone at U.A. He wouldn't know what an arcade was, or how soft the plushies in those little claw game machines were. He wouldn't have had a birthday party that wasn't tinged with guilt or regret or longing. He wouldn't have Clementine at U.A., wouldn't have been with Class 1-A throughout most of this shit—and Prime does that make him writhe.

That very thought of these same people going through this same shit without another person to rely on like Tommy, without another person to at least try and lighten up their days, it—it makes him unimaginably furious, and mournful, and all around too sappy and sentimental for Tommy's tastes.

...And he fucking left that by coming here, blocking himself away from the world. But if Aizawa is right, everyone would still be willing to give this and *more* to him.

He has to stop thinking about it, because it makes his entire body warm, and *Tommy does not deserve this*.

Fuck. *Fuck*.

"—my! *Tommy!*" Aizawa's voice cuts him out of whatever fucking spiral Tommy was in. He recoils a little at the large, calloused hand on his shoulder, staying perfectly still as it goes away and he realizes that oh, that was Aizawa's. Fuck, this shit just has him splattered all over the ground like the liquid in an overflowing drink.

Aizawa sighs. (...Wait, how the fuck is he even over here? Did. Did the man climb over the cobble?) "Five things you can see." The underground hero demands. "*Now.*"

Shit, okay—"The cobble," Tommy answers immediately, his heart still pounding like a jackrabbit. "Stone walls. You. My sleeves. Uh, the t-torch all the way back there."

"Good. Four things you're touching?"

"There's stone fuckin' stabbing my palms. Uh, stone behind me, too. You touched my shoulder. My—my eyepatch's really fucking wet."

Aizawa asks Tommy for three things he can hear, next, then two smells, and one thing he can taste. Tommy's curled into himself shamefully at that point, trying to shrink all his over-six-foot glory for once. This is so pathetic and embarrassing, and Tommy is thankful but also not that Aizawa's the only person who's found him.

There's a silence after Tommy answers the taste part. He hates it.

"I care so fucking much," Tommy says suddenly, voice hoarse, letting the truth sink into the air unbidden for once, because it's so much better than confronting... that silence. (Always running, even now. Tommy's gone soft.) "I care too *fucking* much, and I think I'm dying because of it, Aizawa. How do you stop caring?"

Aizawa's face does a weird looking scrunch at that. Makes him look constipated, something that would've made Tommy laugh on any other day. And his next words are weird, too, chosen carefully and spoken slowly after a moment of pondering that makes Tommy want to take back his truth.

"I don't think you should want to stop caring," he says, "because if you're still caring, that means you're still winning."

Tommy stares at him. "What?"

Aizawa leans back from his crouch to sit cross-legged in front of Tommy. "There's scars all over you," he starts, waving his hand to gesture to Tommy's entire being, "so I have only assumed that people have harmed you before. I don't know their reasoning, and I don't know their methods, and I'm sorry you had to go through any of that. Regardless, from what I can interpret from these scars and your instinctual reactions, one of their weapons was using fear to mold you for their purposes. Whether that means absolute obedience to them, fundamentally changing who you are, or some other goal, I have no clue.

"Maybe they have succeeded, maybe they've only been partially successful, or maybe they've failed entirely. But the fact that you still have enough empathy to care for others is, and always will be, good." The underground hero's fingers reach up, gently resting on his yellow goggles. "Most vigilantes usually go corrupt, you know. They get drunk on power and overconfidence, or start asking for absurd riches for their 'help,' or maybe their morality changes entirely—it all leads to a downfall, eventually. It doesn't take long, either; a month or two is enough to see some changes. Heroes do that too, sometimes.

"Yet in the entirety of your vigilante career, not once did you ask for favors, money, or had a change in heart. You genuinely helped people because you wanted to, even if you never saw them again. People like that are rare, and I think you know that as much as I do, or even better than me."

Tommy has not looked this man in the eye for most of this, instead looking at an angle where he can see Aizawa's movements but not his face. He's kind of scared to, but by Prime is it tempting. Aizawa still continues talking. "Like this, I think you are successfully chipping at whatever fears and manipulations they've set on you," he says. "If you were forced to be dangerous, then you wouldn't have let those people live. If you had to be obedient to people who made you a spy, let's say, then you aren't supposed to genuinely like the students—yet here you are. If you were molded to have no hope, then, well, you've never been fixed to that mindset for as long as I've known you."

(Tommy is young, near thirteen or fourteen or fifteen, when he turns dangerous, fresh off L'Manburg's first war, with scars littering him physically and mentally. Tommy was still naive enough to fall under Dream's thumb in exile. Dream had shattered him, killed him three times, and yet. And yet.)

"What makes you think I'm *not* a spy?" Tommy asks, because he's still reeling from everything else.

Aizawa raises his hand and raises a finger. "You were a vigilante before this who, once again, only helped others before this." Two. "You made *specialized weapons* for the students to train with, and actually thought of reasons why and how they can improve." Three. "You were desperate for the students' safety before the internships and have shown several times that you care for their well-beings, even now." Four. "And instead of reporting anything to someone else, you're down here, aren't you?"

Ah. Tommy looks down, hunching himself in more.

"All of that shows that you're winning because you still care. You said it yourself: you ran away because you used to draw danger to yourself in the past, and thought that if you left, all the danger would follow and leave everyone else alone." Tommy hears Aizawa snort, as if that fact was a little funny. "Is that not the opposite of being hopeless? Is that not the opposite of what your ab—*enemies* want?"

"They want to rip that caring part of you out, from what I can tell. They want to crush you until you're nothing but ash." Aizawa continues, "Of course caring will hurt in situations like these, when you try and try but it feels like nothing you do is impacting anything. But caring also means that you still believe there's a way out, that you are still compassionate and empathetic and hopeful despite everything—and isn't that everything your enemies despise? The fact that you're still *trying*, still doing things to try and prevent them no matter how much suffering you take; I think that so long as you keep doing that, you are always winning over them."

What does Tommy say to that? Prime, what does Tommy say to *any of that*?

And it, it's like Aizawa doesn't even *expect* an answer! He just—he fucking *backs off a little*! "Consider it," is all he says after, and those words lodge themselves into Tommy's brain. Fucking—"consider it." What the fuck. What the *fuck*.

Tommy laughs out of habit, a little hysterical. It's so loud as it reverberates down the hall, especially when there's nothing that follows it. Tommy isn't sure what to follow it with. A joke? A "yeah?" He's just—he's so tired from the last few days and this, and all of this is so fucking *hard*.

"Is Dream here?" Aizawa questions after some time. All of a sudden, Tommy sits ramrod-straight, muscles aching from how hard he'd compressed himself into a ball. "I don't know who they are," the

underground hero quickly clarifies. "I will not make you say who they are. I only know them because you mentioned them, just now, during your—breakdown. All I want to know is if they're *here*."

Tommy purses his lips. He takes out his communicator, flicks it on, ignores the—holy shit, the *thousands* of missed calls, and tries.

/msg Dream Fuck you

...

Error Occurred: Player Not Found.

...Same shit as always.

From the way Aizawa frowns after looking at Tommy's reaction, he doesn't need Tommy to tell him anything. And just like that, they fall into contemplative silence again.

Just as Tommy's feeling sick of feeling like shit and about to suggest getting out, Aizawa sighs. "I'm sorry for not protecting them," he says. Tommy's brows furrow just as the man clarifies, "It's what I wanted to start with. Todoroki, Iida... Midoriya. I promised to protect them like a sufficient hero would, and I... wasn't even there."

One of the underground hero's fingers hooks on part of his scarf. "It's a bit illogical to apologize, considering that the distance between the internships and me was vast, yet I believe it still stands. Maybe if I'd fought for more protective measures, or if I'd thought of more loopholes to exploit and helped Nedzu out, or even just taught those three differently in some way, things would be different." He cracks a wry smile. "If you distrust heroes now, I won't blame you. You have every right."

...Is it *Tommy's* time to be the comforting one? What even *is* this timeline?

Tommy huffs and decides to play that role anyway because, "Frankly, most of that is still bullshit." He says. Aizawa reels back just the slightest, startled. "You've got some of how it's bullshit down already: you weren't there. But also, you know that there were a fuck-ton of Nomu there, and since you're like, you know, *a pro hero*, you'd have to deal with those fucks and also injured people before anything. Civilians are more helpless than your students, you'd probably think.

"And also, at least you, like. *Tried*." Tommy shifts so that he's leaning to the side, head resting against a stone wall. His legs ache, and not from too much energy for once, but a bone-deep exhaustion. Tommy wants to lay down and sleep, nightmares be damned. "You did what you could, or what you thought was enough. You've put a lot more effort than most people I've met. And I feel like Iida would've bullshitted something to get to Stain anyway, you know? Like—he wasn't... before the internships, you know how he was, right?"

Aizawa nods. Tommy takes that as a prompt to continue. "He was all... you know. *Off*. And I don't think you'd be able to control Iida no matter what you could've done, *especially* with how he was at the time. That's not part of why your promise would break," Tommy muses, shifting his eyepatch. "That's the student's fault, innit? Not to mention, you can't control the system that like, put Iida, Todoroki, and Izuku in—in *prison* anyway, so."

Tommy is tired of everything at this point, but he thinks he can say he hates silences the most. Then, Aizawa asks, "Then do you still trust...?"

This shit. Tommy huffs, playing with his sleeve as he thinks. "Maybe not all heroes," he decides, "but you?" He gnaws on his lip. This is the most vulnerable he's been with anyone since Izuku, in this server. "...Yeah, sure. Why the fuck not."

His attempt to play it off doesn't really work from the way Aizawa sags in what seems to be relief or something. "Alright," the man says. "I'm glad that there's at least that."

Tommy huffs again. He gets up, wincing at how his legs buzz a little and his knees nearly buckle. "Enough of that," he announces, leaning more heavily against the stone. "I feel exhausted, and you're probably about three seconds away from passing the fuck out compared to me. Move a little and I'll get us out of this—what, hole? Whatever, I'll get us out of this thing, and we can go back up and I can... go back to U.A."

Aizawa grunts wordlessly, getting up himself. As Tommy breaks the block of cobblestone barricading them in, he questions, "Is the glow normal?"

What. "What?" Tommy asks, turning towards Aizawa after a moment of hesitation. "Glowing? *Am* I glowing?" He checks his clothes, frowning, before swinging his elbow away from Aizawa swiftly. A few specks of red light up on his clothes like the atrocity that is glitter.

"Oh, that's just redstone dust," Tommy answers, relieved. No creepy bullshit. "It just activates a little when I move—"

"I was referring to your eye," Aizawa clarifies quizzically, as if he thought Tommy already knew. "It's been glowing this entire time through your eyepatch, just two blocks of pink diagonal to one another. It was like that before your breakdown, bright enough that I saw it through your hair."

What.

Tommy reaches for the patch of fabric, recoiling when there's the faintest glow on his hand. "That—I don't..." He swallows. With a finger, Tommy slips it under his eyepatch and gently prods at the scar around his eye, or where he thinks it is. Doesn't hurt still, just like the start.

"Uh," he answers eloquently. "That, the brighter glow, that *isn't* normal, but it doesn't *hurt*. Maybe it's just being down here or some shit." Tommy nods to himself, lowering his hand. "Yeah. I've been here too long, eh?"

Aizawa frowns, clearly suspicious. "Isn't it one of your Quirk's drawbacks, that it's changed your eye? It's what I've assumed, at least. Recovery Girl should—"

"Nnnnnnope!" Tommy whirls around, already backtracking his route. His sudden pace plays with the fires of the torches that remained lit, and his voice echoes down the path. "It was never a drawback! Just a little, uh, side effect! I'm *fiiiiine*, I don't need to go to Recov at all! Nope!"

Behind him, Tommy can hear Aizawa sigh, grumbling something under his breath. But Tommy also hears the man's footsteps follow him anyway, so who cares, he's won! He grins a little as he breaks into a light sprint, each step taking him closer to the end of these catacombs and to the surface.

1. no idea how any of this would work in japan lmao; like. 3 students being imprisoned + usj + sports festival obv calls for some sort of break from some academics imo (hOW WOULD THEY FOCUS. THIS IS LIKE HALF THEIR YEAR OR SMTH EVEN W ALL THE EXTENDED BREAKS I PUT IN) so i thought postponing academic-related exams for them is alright. (originally was gonna cancel them but my kind-of-beta told me that was dumb so !)

anyway if any of this doesn't make sense to you (like a Why Would You Do That kind) i call upon creative liberties again and say that it's Fanfic Logic [\[return to text\]](#)

2. referencing tommy's thoughts on going to prison or joining u.a. when he first wakes up in the hospital. nedzu is a scary mofo who'd have noticed tommy's fear of prison even if tommy wasn't a shit liar [\[return to text\]](#)

SUMMER!!!!!! enjoy this chap; hopefully i will mass produce more like i did post stain arc :D prolly not since i have the loosest outline but whAT everrrrr :]]]]

aghhhhh,,,, ending is awkward but like idk how else to end it orz

catharsis for tommy !!!!!!! when was the last time he's cried ? literally No Idea !!! that is Not Healthy !!!!! so . here's some processing emotions in a healthy way, i think? maybe idk

when will tommy actually start healing and not be kicked down? um. haha, abt that—

hope i havent been repeating themes too much or like making no sense lmao ! am very forgetful and also rarely beta ahaha

(ALSO THANK YOU FOR 45K HITS AND 1,800 KUDOS !!!! :DDD)

see yall next chappie hopefully (but prolly not) this month :D

p.s. if i just don't update next month assume that mental health + the chapter and plot progression overall is kicking my ass, because rn it currently is. will try my best but idk !! i think it'll turn out to be an unsatisfying chapter for me no matter what i do

,,, not an actual chapter

Chapter Notes

„ i should've done this ages ago ,, sorry,,,,,,,,,,,,,

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

HEY!! I'M ALIVE!!!!

and i know what literally everyone reading this is thinking and feeling right now. probably some kind of sadness because this fic is being discontinued. you'd be... right-but-also-not BECAUSE IT'S IN AN INDEFINITE HIATUS! and like most ao3 authors i do have reasons (NOT THE "i got hit by a bus and a car and a train and also got sick and" KIND). and also a hopeful ending!!!

tl;dr: several in-real-life factors are still kicking my ass. though an "indefinite hiatus" usually means discontinued, and despite the in-real-life factors, i am 100 percent sure i will update in the future. that "future" is probably... not this year. or the next, with the way things are going. sorry... but there will be an update!

now for, like, the actual specifics. (don't worry, no tws! it's just me being... like... way too personal, i guess? i don't know, i'm just rambling.)

so! lately (particularly since i last updated (yes, this has been going on for That Long)), my mental health has NOT been good! surprise surprise considering the topics i try to write about in this fic + my author's notes. i think this is near an all-time low, though, and uh. writing about tommy + 1-a's struggles during my current state is... also not good, methinks.

furthermore, i've been very dissatisfied with my writing. it's gotten to the point where i just... can't reread this fic. not anymore. the few mildly negative or neutral comments i've gotten have made me just want to erase my existence and apologize a thousand times lol. i really can't take criticism well... i think that ties in with my mental health, but whatever, i'm prolly just making excuses lmao. anyway, i'm still not happy with this fic, and i can't bring myself to reread it even though the only reason i remember some plot points is because of my notes. sad, isn't it? (not meant to create pity, just an observation)

(any positive comments have always brightened my day, though! i used to roll around in bed and giggle stupidly if i was alone and read some, haha.)

which brings me to my next topic: i made this fic out of love, self-indulgence, and passion for dsm5 and bnha. fanfiction in general is an act of passion and love. i have a chapter ready, but i absolutely despise it. i don't want to taint this fic with shitty, halfhearted writing—i never fucking will, mark my word. i would hate myself more if i did because it's better to have what i've currently published be incomplete than have a bad ending due to bad writing. like yeah, this entire fic is pretty shit in that department (in my opinion), but at least i loved it, you know? at least some people love it, too, even now.

and all of that hatred that's keeping me from writing isn't fair! i genuinely have put in a lot of effort behind the scenes despite my shit memory and impulsive ideas i shoved in the story! i had, like, a

half-finished cover for the next installment of this fic, and thousands of words of planning and scrapped ideas, and—well, you get the point. people say to be cringe is to be free but my self-esteem is too low for me to even indulge in that ideaahaha...

but i don't think that self-loathing's going away any time soon. on top of that, there's my disinterest in these two fandoms (i.e. dsmp, specifically because of dream's, uh... allegations, as well as tommy dissing fanfics) and the fact that i have no time to write. and also, i think my writing hasn't been getting better, so. yeah.

you can assume the guilt of not updating has been devouring me and that's why i put that i'm positive i'll update in the tldr BUT IT'S TRUE! i do actually believe i will update. it just... won't be in the near future. or even next year. hell, it might not even be a true update at all, if things get worse; i might just publish all of my notes, for those have enough love and passion (and coherence) in them that i'd consider them the rest of the story all on their own.

when i wrote this fic at first, i promised my wattpad readers i'd fucking finish it. i'm not good at keeping them, but this one i swear to you as well. i will finish this fic.

to those who have stuck around this long and are willing to wait... that's a pretty herculean task lmao, but thank you and i'm sorry. to those who'll leave, that's okay !!! thank you for reading and i'm sorry. for new readers binging this entire fic, sorry it's ending like this for now but thank you for reading. essentially: thank you so, so, so much, and i am so, so, so sorry. i hope you understand.

ENOUGH SERIOUS DRAMATIC TALK !!!!! as always, i hope you've been having a good day/night/time wherever you are, i hope you've been drinking enough or eating enough, and i sincerely wish you are doing better than me! :D

Chapter End Notes

if any true future updates have plot holes in them, it's because i've forgotten the plot / minor details. sorry.

,,, not an actual chapter

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not a chapter, but defeat :[

hi! bad news: if i've posted this, i've decided to abandon/orphan this fic. aaand my acc, later, probably.

's 'cause of my usual excuses + how i can't really bring myself to get motivation for this anymore, especially ever since it feels like every single cc besides benchtrio + philza, manifold, and a few others aren't bad people??? and i kinda. can't really look at dsmp fondly anymore, and stuff. idk. but ALSO, a bigger reason is that i hate the way i've taken this story + forgot the stuff for what i've wanted to write before, therefore i only have like idk the Really Big scenes i liked and it's just..... idk, it's not enough. 'm moving on, you know? (+, i'm feeling more dread than mild enthusiasm when i think abt writing anything related to this fic just because of how ashamed of it i am. nd some of yall will be like "nooo but it's so good!!" (not mocking) and i love yall!!! yall were real big motivation back then. but my low self esteem won, haha)

've been debating this for a bit so it's not really outta the blue, but damn am i sorry to y'all haha.. i promised to finish this at the beginning and then here i am. with an unfinished fic. ha. .

but like, i did put real effort. i always have. so i'm keeping this up, just not under my name and stuff. (i'm absolutely nuking my wattpad acc and not coming back though lmao).

adding to that effort bit, i did try to rewrite this fic, but i can't really keep up yk? haha, life and stuff. i'm sorry i can't really go in deeper, to offer more explanation, but yk. yeah.

anyway! since i don't remember the OG goods/plans, here is [an entire google doc](#) with a whole Fuck Ton of info on what i wanted to do for this fic + what i do have of the og plans. if that's not allowed and ao3 strikes my fic down or smth, then oh well. i guess. nd if i didn't configure access correctly n yall can't access it when i orphan everything, then damn. sorry in advance. i really fuckin hope it ain't gonna be like that.

i hope yall are having a good time wherever you are, though. and that you'll continue to. or just have a better time than me most days, haha. goodbye!!

End Notes

,,,,,,,,, you've made it this far, so if you want, you can check my wattpad acc out,,,,,,,,, it's
@eraxas_,,,,,,,,,,

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!